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Christmas 1926
"Just a Little
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A Christian But A Roman

By the Same Author

DEBTS OF HONOR,

THE POOR PLUTOCRATS,

A HUNGARIAN NABOB,

THE NAMELESS CASTLE,

ETC., ETC.

A Christian But A Roman

By

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A Christian But A Roman

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A CHRISTIAN BUT A ROMAN.

CHAPTER I.

In the days of the Cæsars the country surrounding Rome vied in splendour and luxury with the capital itself. Throughout the whole region appeared the villas of Roman patricians, abodes of aristocratic comfort, where every artist, from the sculptor to the—cook, had done his utmost to render them attractive and beautiful.

These noble patricians, many of whom had incomes of eight or nine millions, often found themselves in the unpleasant position of being obliged to avoid Rome. Weariness, wounded vanity, insurrections of the people and the prætorians, but es-

pecially distrust of the Cæsar, compelled them to turn their backs upon the imperial city and retire to their country estates.

Thus, for several years, Mesembrius Vio, the oldest Senator—who since the death of Probus had not set foot in Rome nor given the Senate a glimpse of him—had resided on his estate at the mouth of the Tiber. True, he said it was on account of the gout and the cataracts from which his feet and his eyes suffered; and his visitors always found him sitting in his curule chair, with his ivory crutch in his hand and a broad green shade over his eyes.

The old man had two daughters. One, Glyceria, had married when very young, thanks to the imperial favour, a great lord who had become a libertine; soon after the libertine lost his head, and his property, as well as the imperial favour, went to the beautiful widow, who in a short

time had the reputation of being the Aspasia of the Roman capital. Of course, Mesembrius was not only blind, but deaf, when Glyceria was mentioned in his presence; he himself never permitted her name to cross his lips. His second daughter was Sophronia, who was always by the old man's side at his country estate. A beautiful and virtuous maiden, she seemed to unite the charms of three Greek goddesses: the graceful form of Venus, the noble beauty of Juno's countenance, and the purity of Psyche.

Yet Sophronia owed no special gratitude to heathen goddesses; on the seashore nearby lived the wise Eusebius, the descendant of the apostle, and the beautiful girl had long attended the secret meetings where the holy man announced to the followers of Christ the doctrine of the one God who dwells in the soul.

Old Mesembrius knew that his favour-

ite daughter was secretly a proselyte of the new faith, and he did not oppose it; nay, he did not even let his daughter perceive that he had any idea of it.

Young sons of patrician families often came from Rome, lured by the fame of the maiden's beauty, and all cherishing the hope of obtaining her hand and with it her millions. Mesembrius received them very kindly, arranged great banquets in their honour, and brought out wine a century old. The youths were soon intoxicated by the liquid fire, and after the last libation each one showed himself in his true colours and poured forth the most secret thoughts in his heart.

Old Mesembrius listened and reflected. One unmasked himself as a profligate; another was free from such tastes, but developed great talent for being slave and despot in the same person; and even if an *omnibus numeris salutus* was found, he

showed, when the last subject—his opinion of Christianity—was introduced, like all the rest, that it was his conviction that the Christian religion was nothing more than a sect which denied the gods and, by withdrawing from the popular pleasures, games, and combats in the arena, embittered every joy by their obdurate melancholy and in their stead celebrated horrible rites in gloomy caverns, compelled their followers to pierce with their knives the heart of an infant rolled in flour, and to drink its blood; till the gods, in their wrath, visited the earth with floods, pestilences, earthquakes, and barbarians, and that consequently there could not be enough of these people boiled in oil, burned in pitch, torn by wild beasts, and buried alive to avert from the land the severe punishments sent by the wrathful gods.

Mesembrius had heard enough, and gave his daughter to none of these youths.

He honoured the martyrs, but did not wish to find Sophronia's name among them.

Not one of the rejected suitors saw her face.

One day a sun-burned youth entered Mesembrius's dwelling. The old man, who sat in the trichinum of his summer-house, saw him, and, in spite of the cataracts on his eyes, shouted:

"Are you coming to see me, Manlius Sinister? Come, come, here I am."

The old man could still see when he chose.

The youth hastened up to him, embraced him, and pressed his hand.

"How manly you have grown!" said Mesembrius, smiling; and, as if his eyes were not enough, he felt with his hands the youth's face, arms, and shoulders. "You have become a man indeed since you marched away with Probus. So you've come to ask me for my daughter's hand?"

Manlius seemed disconcerted by this straightforward question.

"I am not so selfish, Mesembrius. Our ancient friendship brought me to your house."

"I know, I know. We are aware of the kind of friendship which exists between an old man and a young one, especially when the old man has a beautiful daughter. For my daughter is very beautiful, Manlius, very beautiful! If you could see her! Don't say that you saw her four years ago—what was that? You were then a child, and so was she; what did you know about it? But now! O Manlius! it would be a great mistake of yours if you did not fall in love with her."

"What use would it be, old friend? You have refused so many suitors who were better, richer, and more powerful than I that I do not even venture to hope."

"Why, Manlius? Cannot you, too, gain power and wealth? Is not your uncle, worthy Quaterquartus, the most famous augur in Rome, whose prophecies always prove true, who holds in his hands the future of the Cæsar and the state?"

"That is all true."

"Then you see you may yet become a great man. You need only seek the favour of Carinus a little, and win your uncle's good will. Surely it is easy?"

"At least it is not difficult."

"See! See! Who knows how far you may go? What will it cost Carinus to have a rich old Senator drowned, and give you his palaces and treasures? Then you, too, will own mansions and slaves, will bathe in rose-water and eat peacock's tongues. What bars your way? You can gain all these things by cringing. Cringing, I say."

Manlius let the old man talk on.

"But stay with me as long as you feel inclined, and be of good cheer."

In the evening a magnificent banquet was served in honour of Manlius; everything that could please the palate, eye, and heart appeared.

The young man's face glowed with the fire of old Falernian wine, and he often struck the table with his clenched fist, entirely forgetting the respect due to his host.

Mesembrius saw that the soul of his guest was beginning to open and, propping his cheek upon his hand, he commenced the examination.

"Well, Manlius, how do you like the Falernian? Am I not right in saying that Italy is the bosom of the earth, for here are the breasts—namely, the mountains which produce this wine?"

"Yet I have quaffed a more inspiring drink in my life-time."

"A more inspiring drink, Manlius? At whose table?"

"From the Euphrates."

"What do you mean?"

"It was after the battle of Ctesiphon. We had fought all day long, my arms were dripping with blood and my brow with sweat. In the evening the Persian army was scattered, and on that one day the Euphrates overflowed its banks."

"And you drank from it?"

"Yes. That water has an intoxicating effect."

"Fame intoxicated you, Manlius. It was in that water."

"I don't know what was in it; for when I raised my helmet, which I had filled with it, to my lips, I did not set it down until the last drop was drained."

"And then other good things awaited you? You could indulge yourselves to your heart's content in conquered Ctesiphon. I can imagine how well you fared with the beautiful dark-eyed women whose husbands were obliged to abandon

them, and the palaces and storehouses of which you took possession. Every soldier was swimming in milk and honey."

"Well, we didn't do much of that sort of swimming, for we marched farther that very night; and as for the dark-eyed wives, all the leaders had issued strict orders that the captured women should not be insulted by the soldiers."

"Well, well, such orders are not usually taken too strictly. We know that."

"By Hercules! Then you know very little about it!" exclaimed Manlius furiously. "We took it so strictly that I had one of the soldiers in my legion, who abducted a maiden, bound by the feet to two trees which had been bent down and tore him asunder when they sprang back again."

"Well, you won't tear me asunder on that account," laughed old Mesembrius, delighted with the noble indignation dis-

played by his guest. He beckoned as he spoke to a Numidian slave who stood near, holding a richly engraved silver basin: "Come, Ramon, fill my guest's goblet."

"No," cried Manlius; "I can fill it myself. I need not be served like Carinus, who is too indolent to hold his goblet when he drinks, and is afraid of wearying himself if he lifts a fig from the dish to his lips with his own hands."

"Ho! ho! Manlius Sinister! You are slandering the Cæsar!"

"*Ædastor!* It is no slander. Is it not well known that his feet never touch the earth, and that, even in his bathroom, he uses a wheel-chair? To-day he had a ring on his finger and, complaining that he could not endure the burden of its weight, ordered it to be drawn off. Recently he had a notorious forger of documents, who understands how to imitate other people's writing marvellously well, released from

prison, and appointed him his private secretary, to be spared the trouble of inscribing his signature with his own hand. Now this cheat provides every document with the Cæsar's name."

"O Manlius! You are saying a great deal about Carinus, who was once your schoolmate."

"I have no inclination to boast of that. True, I often shared my bread with him when he had none, and exchanged his tattered pallium for mine, but I feel no desire that he should ever recognise me, since I might easily fare like the rest of his schoolmates who appeared before him to remind him of former days, and whom Carinus unceremoniously thrust into the 'Tower of Forgetfulness,' to rid himself of the uncomfortable feelings of the past."

"Ah! Manlius, you are talking like Seneca. You will never rise high in Carinus's favour in this way."

"When was that necessary for a free

Roman?" cried the knight, raising his head proudly. "I have a sword and a brave heart; if these will not lead me to fame, I want no power which can be obtained by crawling in the dust. It suits only dogs and libertines."

Mesembrius laughed and rubbed his hands in delight; then he urged the youth to drink more, and the wine began to restore to the face trained amid the corruption of Roman society to dissimulation, its real character.

"Go on with your story, my good Manlius; we stopped at the battle of Ctesiphon. That is the enemy stopped there, while you went on as far as you could."

"With all due respect to your grey beard, Senator, never say to me: as far as you could. For we might have gone to the Juxartes—there were none who could have opposed us. The flying Persians vainly destroyed everything before

us: not even deserts and wildernesses can offer obstacles to the Roman legions; every soldier carried provisions enough for ten days on his back. I ought to add that, during the whole dreary campaign, we slept on the frozen ground in the severest winter weather. The Persians convinced themselves that they could not check our advance, and, when we reached a city whose barbarous name the gods cannot expect a Roman tongue to utter, we encamped there. As twilight closed in, the envoys of the Persian monarch—magnificently dressed men with braided hair, rouged, with black eyebrows and fingers laden with rings—came and asked to be led before the Augustus: I mean Carus, don't confound him with Carinus. They were conducted into the presence of a man who was sitting on the bare ground, with a yellow leather cap on his head, eating rancid bacon and raw beans. He had thrown over his shoulders a

coarse, shabby purple mantle, which distinguished him from the others."

"That was Carus; I recognise him," muttered the old Senator.

"The Augustus did not even permit the entrance of the envoys to interrupt him in his meal, and while he was quietly crunching the beans with his strong teeth, they delivered, with theatrical pathos, their carefully prepared speeches, whose glittering promises and high-sounding threats harmonised ill with the raw lupines which the Cæsar was eating. When they finished at last, Carus took the yellow leather cap from his smooth bald head, and, pointing to it, said to the ambassadors: 'Look here, and heed my words. If your king does not acknowledge the supremacy of Rome and restore her provinces, I'll make your country as bare as my head.'"

"I recognise Carus there, too."

"The envoys went off in great alarm,

and the legions struck up the war song, whose refrain is: *Mille, mille, mille occidit.*"

"It was composed in honor of Carus, who is said to have killed in many a battle more than a thousand foes."

"Yes, yes, that's true."

"His son would kill ten times as many, but of his own subjects. Never mind that, however. Go on, Manlius; tell me what else befell you. Every one has a different story about that whole campaign. One says you were attacked by the black legions, a second speaks of tumults, a third of miracles. This much is certain: instead of pressing onward, you suddenly turned back, although no one could resist you, you said."

"And it is true; men could no longer resist us, but is there no mightier power on earth?"

"Certainly; the Roman gods. But I hope you did not draw their wrath upon

you, and that your augurs had favorable omens. Your uncle, the world-renowned Quaterquartus, was with you."

"Yes, he was with us, and there was no lack of victims or of the entrails of beasts, and plenty of crows were caught."

"Manlius, you speak of these sacred things in a very profane way."

"I have every reason to do so. Our soldiers once captured a man clad partly in skins who, according to his statement, had retired into the wilderness to mortify his body in honor of an invisible God. He had built a pillar of stones, on whose top he had already spent thirty winters and summers, exposed to frost and scorching heat. There he stood all day long, with arms outstretched like a cross, bending forward and striking his head against his knees. Several legionaries were curious to learn the number of these bows, but when they had counted nineteen hundred they grew weary,

dragged him from his pillar, and killed him."*

"And did you pity this Nazarene?"

"Let us speak lower, Mesembrius. It is dangerous to utter and to hear my words. Do not think that I am intoxicated and invent this tale. I saw this man breathe his last; for I came too late to save him. He did not curse his murderers. An expression of supernatural bliss rested upon his face, he raised his eyes rapturously toward heaven, and died blessing those who slew him. I drove them away and, to relieve his suffering, gave him some cold water. He thanked me and, with his last strength, whispered in my ear: 'Roman! do not cross the Tigris, for there lies the Eden of the invisible God, who is not to be offended.' I repeated the warning to the Cæsar's younger son, Numerian, who was the friend of every good soldier, and he car-

* Simeon the Stylite.

ried it to the Augustus, who, struck by the ascetic's words, asked Quaterquartus to hold an *augurium*. My uncle's skill in announcing oracles which no one can contradict is well known."

"Your words are very bold, Sinister."

"Thus he once predicted to Probus that, after a thousand years, his family would restore the ancient glory of Rome."

"After a thousand years!"

"At the end of a long mummery we learned from my uncle's muttering lips that God would fight in the next battle."

"Without adding whether with or against us?"

"The Imperator ordered us to march forward and, on the very same day, we crossed the Tigris. At sunset several of the men who had killed the martyr Simeon Stylites were suddenly filled with horror and cried out loudly; for lo! he stood before them on a hilltop with arms outstretched like a cross, while

amid continual bowing he struck his knees with his head. And I had helped to bury the lifeless form! The night was dark; clouds, rising from all directions, covered the horizon; flashes of lightning darted to and fro in the distance as if they were fighting with one another. The pealing of thunder echoed nearer and nearer, the world was veiled in gloom, sounds never heard before began to roar about us, and when a vivid flash of lightning seemed to cleave the depths of the firmament, we imagined that we beheld countless shining forms gazing down at us. It appeared to every legion as though the other legions were engaged in a fierce, bloody conflict, the clashing of swords and lances echoed around us, but there was no fighting anywhere. In the darkness we thought that our whole army was transformed into a single vast, confused mass, in which man fought against man, the mounted cohorts trampled down the

foot-soldiers, the tribunes rode at the head of the legions, and the troops met in desperate, destructive shocks. Only while the lightning glared did we see the legions standing in motionless squares in their places. Suddenly, amid a terrific peal of thunder, a quivering mass of fire crashed down amid our ranks, shaking the earth beneath and the air around us. Horror made us fall upon our knees, every animal hid its head in the earth, and the fearful tumult roared into our ears the judgment of a mighty God. When we ventured to look up again, a fire was blazing in the midst of our camp. The lightning had struck the tent of the Augustus. No one dared to extinguish it, though the Cæsar and the statues of the protecting gods of the army were within its walls. All were burned. Then who are the gods, if not they? O Mesembrius, is it true that above us dwells an invisible Being, who is the Lord of heaven and

earth, and that the lifeless stone images which we worship are not even able to defend themselves?"

Mesembrius pressed the youth's hand. He had heard enough.

"We will say no more about it, Manlius. You shrank from the power that barred your way. It was God! How did the army behave later?"

"The soldiers could not be induced to march forward; they walled up the place where Carus Augustus was helplessly burned with the protecting gods of Rome, and now there stands in the midst of the wilderness a building with neither doors nor windows, that no human foot may enter the spot which God has cursed. The troops chose Numerian for their commander, and demanded that he should lead them back to Illyria. I was commissioned to bear these tidings to Carinus; that is why I am here with you."

"I hope you will do this often. It is

a great pleasure to be able to live in Rome, is it not?"

"No pleasure to me; I would rather go back to my legions."

"Really? Then surely you have not yet seen Carinus' circus and the magnificent games which only Rome can offer; you have not visited the baths of Antonius, the warm baths scented with the fragrance of roses in walls adorned with gems—you have not yet found the woman you love in Rome, eh?"

"I have seen all, without finding pleasure in it. What am I, a battle-scarred legionary, just from the rude land of Scythia, to admire in the bloody fool's-play of your arenas? Here they make a game of war; we make war a game. And I never cared for the thermæ; warm baths are only fit for *quirites*, not for soldiers. Blood can be washed off with cold water; true, a polluted man needs warm."

"But you have not answered my third

question. Have you found no fair woman in Rome? Yet why do I ask? They will find you, even if you do not seek them. Oh, the Roman beauties are neither proud nor arrogant. When you have once appeared in the Forum, and they have seen your stately, well-formed figure, I shall have to ask: Did they not drag you away with them? Did they not tear you to pieces as the Bacchantes did Orpheus?"

"Oho! Mesembrius, the falcon is not caught with lime-twigs."

"Go! go! Why should you be a falcon any more than the rest? As if the doves of Venus had not built their nests in the helmet of Mars! Go! Dissimulation does not suit your face. You flushed crimson and lowered your eyes. Why do you wish to deceive an old man like me? Or have the morals of Rome improved under the shadow of Carinus? And while formerly, when one of the

Vestal Virgins died, a substitute could scarcely be found, have all who once worshipped Aphrodite become priestesses of Vesta?"

"I did not say so, Mesembrius."

"Then it is the other way. Come, don't deny that you have had an interesting adventure. Five or six women surrounded you at once, laying their hearts and fortunes at your feet, and you chose the fairest, the one whose embraces were most ardent, whose kisses were most glowing? Or you could not choose, and loved them all? One crowned you with garlands in the evening, another in the morning; you vowed fidelity to one by the sun, to another by the moon, and loyally kept your vow to every one? Very good, very noble! This is the joy of youth, Manlius! In my early years I was no better!"

"But, Mesembrius, you gave me no time to speak; all that you are saying

has nothing to do with me. I will frankly confess that during my one day's stay in Rome I had more to do with the slaves who were sent to me by their mistresses than with their husbands, to whom I had been sent; but it is not my habit to attribute any special importance to such matters. I am a member of the Manlius family, in which it is an ancient custom for the men to love only one woman, but faithfully and forever—to mourn her constantly if she dies, to kill her if she betrays him, and to avenge her if she is wronged."

"These are fine words, Manlius, but I see a ring glittering on your finger of a style which men do not wear; I suppose it belongs to the woman you love."

"You are not mistaken in one thing. The ring belongs to a lady, and I wear it solely on your account."

"Mine, Manlius? What is the ring to me?"

"When I left the Capitol yesterday evening a veiled matron slipped a thin roll of manuscript into my hand and vanished swiftly among the colonnades; the roll was passed through this ring. From curiosity I opened the parchment and read the following mysterious words: 'Manlius Sinister! You love a maiden whose father is your friend. This old man and his young daughter are threatened by a danger which, except by the gods and their foes, is known to me alone. If you wish to learn it, hasten to me. The bearer of this letter will wait for you at the *Pons Sacer*, night and day, until you come. If you show her this ring, she will lead you to me. Signed, A woman who has loved you from your childhood, and whom you have always scorned; who is hated by those whom she desires to save.' "

"This is a strange occurrence, Manlius."

"To me it is an incomprehensible mystery. Who has the power to look into the depths of my heart and read its feelings? Have my dreams betrayed me, that some one knows I love your daughter, whom I saw four years ago, and have been unable since to forget? And who can the woman be who seeks to save another woman whose love shuts out her own?"

The old man's face darkened. The wine stood untouched a long time before the two who, during the conversation, had become perfectly sober. But their hearts, which the wine had opened, remained unveiled.

"Let me look at the ring more closely," said Mesembrius in a low tone.

Manlius held out his hand. The stone in the ring was a wonderfully carved cameo—the white bust of a beautiful woman, with Greek features, upon a purplish-yellow ground.

Mesembrius frowned gloomily as he

examined the cameo; he averted his head, again gazed fixedly at the ring, and at last with a gesture of loathing, thrust it from him and bowed his gray head despairingly on his breast.

"Why do you look so sad?" asked Manlius. "Do you know this ring? Do you know its owner!"

"I know her," replied the old man in a hollow tone.

"Speak, who is it?"

"Who is it?" repeated Mesembrius with flashing eyes. "Who is it? A shameless hetaira, a loathsome courtesan, whose breath brings pestilence and contagion to the inhabitants of Rome, whose existence is a blot upon the work of creation; who has been cursed by her father so many times that, if all his execrations were fulfilled, no grass would grow upon the earth where she sets her foot, and compassion itself would turn from her in abhorrence."

The old man's last words were lost in a convulsive sob.

"Who is this woman?" cried Manlius, springing from his chair.

"This woman is my daughter," gasped Mesembrius.

"Glyceria?"

"*Abraxas!*" The old man fairly shouted the word used to ward off evil, and shuddered with loathing as he heard the name. Manlius drew the ring from his finger and went to the window, beneath which flowed the Tiber. Mesembrius guessed his intention.

"Don't throw it into the water! A fish might swallow it, the fishermen catch it, and it would again see the light of day. It will poison the Tiber, and whoever drinks from it will go mad. Keep it. I have an idea, on account of which you must wear this ring. You said you had done so until now for my sake."

"I kept it to save you, if need be."

"I thank you, Sinister. So you love me and my daughter. I thank you again and again; we will be grateful. In return, I will give my age, she her youth. We have always held you dear, always regarded you as one of our family. If you wish to guard us from peril—keep this ring—go with it where you are led —seek her who sent it—and kill her."

"Mesembrius! She is your daughter."

"If the basilisk is the child of the bird in whose nest it was hatched."

"But she desires to shield you from some unknown danger."

"For me the world has no danger except she herself! What pestilence, earthquake, tempest, and scaffold mean to the dwellers upon earth, her name embodies to me! If I could approach her I would kill her."

"She wishes to save you."

"Do not believe her. Every word that falls from her lips is a lie; she has deceived her father, she deceives the gods.

Her face looks as innocent as a sleeping babe's. When she speaks you are enchanted; if you should let her go on, she would draw the dagger from your hand, bewitch, ensnare you, melt your heart by her accursed magic arts till you were as cowardly as a scourged slave. She does not paint her face like other women, but her soul; now she is luring you to her by the pretext that she wants to save me and Sophronia, and if you go to her and do not thrust your sword into her heart, ere she can speak one word, she will persuade you to kill us."

"Mesembrius, what has she done to you that you speak of her thus?"

"What has she done? She buried me ere I was dead! She dragged my grey beard in the mire! She poisoned my heart, robbed me of my sight and my blood to paint obscene pictures with them upon the walls of the lenocinium."

"Fury blinds you, Mesembrius."

"Why should it not blind me? Has a Roman no right to curse when people say to him in the Forum: 'Dismount from your horse, for your daughter has lost her honour!' Can I show myself anywhere in Rome without witnessing my disgrace? Is not her name prostituted in all the shameless verses of an Ævius and Mavius? Did she not appear in the amphitheatre in a pantomime before the exulting, roaring populace? Does she not go in broad daylight, with her shameless train, clad in a *tunica vitrea* or *ventus textilis?* Does she not allow herself to be painted as *Venus vulgivava?* And is there an orgy, a bacchanalian festival, in which she does not play the loathsome part of queen? Oh, Manlius, it is terrible when the hair is grey to be unable to look men in the face, to hear everywhere and be forced to read in the eyes of all: 'This is Mesembrius who corrupts Rome! This man gave life to the monster who daily

consumes the bread and drinks the blood of a hundred thousand starving people. Let us beware of approaching him.' Oh, Manlius, believe me, you will yet kill this woman."

"I have never killed a woman, and I never shall."

"Remember my words. This Megæra loves you, and she knows full well that you love another. That this other is her sister will not trouble her; these satiated Messalinas are fastidious, even in blood. Ordinary blood no longer tickles their palates; that of their own kindred is sweetest."

"Guard your tongue from omens!"

"I feel what I say, Manlius. It would be better for you to slay this woman from caution than for vengeance. When you see a serpent, you crush it, do you not, without waiting till it strikes its fangs into your flesh, and gives you reason to destroy it?"

"You are a father, Mesembrius. I understand your grief, but do not share it."

"You will become a husband, and then you will share it."

"How can you expect me to hate, old friend, after you have rendered me happy? You talk of your wrath to a sleeper dreaming of his bliss, while your furious words disturb the stillness of the night. From all you say I realize only that I shall possess Sophronia's love. This word, this thought inspirited me, even when the war cries of the fierce Sarmatians were thundering in my ears, even during the nocturnal attacks of the legions, and in the scorching sunshine of Persian battle-fields. I beheld her lovely face in the river which, swollen by streams of blood, overflowed its banks. It hovers before me now while you talk of blood, and amid your savage speech I hear but one thing—that she will be mine."

"Now I perceive the truth of the words that love makes us blind."

"And hate reckless, you must add."

"May the gods grant that you are right; that some day the whole world may say: 'Mesembrius, the daughter whom you disowned is pure as Diana, and all you said of her was slander, blind imagination!' I—but even then I would say that you must kill her, Manlius, for she has deceived the whole world!"

The old man's eyes were bloodshot; excitement had so wrought upon his whole nervous system that he trembled from head to foot, and when he rose from the triclinium he gripped the arm with such force that the ivory sphinx remained in his hand.

"Slaves, bring torches!" he shouted loudly, forgetting that he usually spoke with asthmatic panting. "Let us go to rest, Manlius; it is long past midnight.

May you dream of your love as I shall of my hate."

He left the pavilion as he spoke, and moved firmly, with head erect, through the long garden to his villa, without remembering that he could not walk a step on account of his gout. The slaves pushed his empty chair behind him.

Manlius remained a long time in the triclinium, lost in thought. Leaning over the sill of the window above the Tiber he gazed dreamily into the waves, flooded with silver by the rising moon. Black boats glittered in her rays along the shore, and the notes of a mournful hymn echoed from the distance through the still air. The outlines of a woman's white-robed figure were visible in one of the boats. Manlius was reflecting upon the emotions that filled his heart. He fancied he was dreaming, as we sometimes dream that we are awake, and now

imagined that he was dreaming of Sophronia's gentle, musing face.

He had no rest; some indescribable feeling oppressed his heart. His excited soul longed for the open air, and, taking his sword, he wrapped his *paludamentum* around him, entered one of the skiffs fastened under the window, and, loosing it from the chain, rowed in the direction of the mysterious melody.

CHAPTER II.

WHAT a wonderful phenomenon it was that truth should triumph over fiction, and the simple doctrines of the Cross should conquer delusive mythology!

The religion of the poets, the dreamy groves, the flower-strewn shore, the chosen deities of the sunlit island worlds, who in the enthusiasm of this artistic nature rose from the foam of the sea, were pervaded by the fragrance of flowers, immortalized as stars. Warm ideal figures united with mankind by sweet love dalliance. How all this fabric vanished from the arms of its worshippers at one word from the mighty Being who, throned on a measureless height, is yet near to every human creature, whom no one can see, but everyone can feel, and who is the

God of the stars as well as of the lilies of the field.

How the altars of the Olympian gods gradually grew cold, how the rose garlands vanished from the golden plinths, how the people disappeared from the perfumed halls to hear beneath the open sky, illumined by glowing sunlight, the words of an invisible truth.

This sky, this sunlit sky was the mystery of mysteries! The night-sky, with its thousand stars, was the mythological heaven; that of the day belonged to the faith of the truth indivisible. Neither the depth nor the height of the latter can be measured. We only feel the beneficent warmth, and from the infinite blue distance an eternal hope tells the heart that beyond this sky is another and a better world, of which this earth is only the shadow; and the darker, the more gloomy are the shadows here, the more radiant is the truth there.

This was the idea which won the victory. Earth ceased to be a prison; death was no affliction, and the Cæsar was no longer omnipotent.

In the time of Augustus Cæsar a poet said:

"If Rome persecutes thee, whither wilt thou flee? Wherever thou mayst go, thou art everywhere in the power of Rome." The new faith offered every persecuted human being a place of refuge, and Rome vainly conquered all the known world. Another unknown world full of secret joys that increased in proportion was reserved for those who suffered here below, and the darker, the gloomier the shadows here, the more radiant would be the truth there.

This faith which wiped the tears from the cheeks of those who wept could not fail to conquer. Soon persecutors and persecuted united in it, for it alone afforded comfort to him who suffered inno-

cently, and forgiveness to him who acted unjustly. The persecutions of the Cæsars only increased the adherents of the new religion instead of lessening them. In the public streets in the midst of Rome appeared those chosen by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the doctrines of the omnipotent God, which they would deny neither on funeral pyres nor under the teeth of the wild beasts in the circus games; and the living torches which, covered with pitch, were kindled to light the imperial gardens, declared, even in the midst of the flames, that what was anguish and suffering here was salvation and joy there.

In vain were they murdered. The blood of the slain merely sealed the doctrines which they attested; and whoever creates martyrs only gains implacable foes.

But the Imperator Carinus invented a new species of martyrdom.

The proselytes shrank neither from death nor from torture. What was an-

guish to others seemed bliss to them; and fragile girls, inspired by the Holy Ghost, sang hymns of praise in the midst of the flames.

Carinus no longer had these sainted virgins dragged to blazing pyres, but gave them to his soldiers; and virtuous women who did not recoil from the most terrible death trembled in the presence of the shame which scorched the purity of their souls more fiercely than the flames of the burning oil. And while they entered the arena of the circus with brave faces, they thought with horror of the hidden dens of sin.

It was a diabolical idea to punish those who, for the transparent purity of their souls, were ready to renounce all the pleasures and joys of earth, by the lowest form of these joys. And Carinus knew that his victims could not even escape this disgrace by death, since the religion of the Christians forbade suicide.

Therefore during his reign believers met at the hour of midnight in secret places, subterranean caverns, and abandoned tombs, and dispersed again at dawn.

The Roman augurs had been informed of these secret meetings; and, that the people might help in searching out the places, they spread the report that the Christians, after all the lights were extinguished, committed horrible deeds which could be done only in the deepest darkness. This was saying a great deal, since in Rome every possible atrocity was perpetrated in the brightest daylight.

. . . . . .

Gliding along the shore in his boat, Manlius constantly drew nearer to the singing which so strangely thrilled his heart, and soon reached an arm of the Tiber, at whose mouth about twenty empty boats were rocking on the water.

He looked around, and saw by the dim,

uncertain moonlight, a large round, massive building, shaded by huge Italian pines, from whose interior the music seemed to issue.

He walked around it. The moon was shining through the windows and colonnades, but no human being was visible. Manlius thought with a shudder of the tales of witches which he had heard in his childhood, of the Sabbath of wicked souls that met in invisible forms in places shunned by all men. His superstitious terror increased as he associated the vision of his dream with this tradition. He always saw before him the face of lovely, gentle Sophronia when he tried to think of these accursed sorcerers; and against the gloomy, horrible background her smiling countenance appeared.

At last he summoned up his courage, and releasing his hand from his cloak, he strode resolutely into the vestibule of the building. As he entered, his thoughts,

at the first glance, took a different direction; for in the centre of this vestibule a square stone had been raised from the floor, and through the opening thus formed, a subterranean hall could be seen, from which rose the singing.

So this was the *Agapeia* of the Christians.

Concealed by the darkness and the shadow of a pillar Manlius saw before him two long rows of figures. The heads of the men were covered with hoods, the women were closely veiled. All were singing a gentle, mournful melody. The tones expressed self-sacrificing sorrow, a sublime, quiet suffering, blended with a strange suggestion of grief which sent a cold shiver through the nerves of the listening Roman.

A few small oil lamps were burning at the end of the dimly lighted hall, by whose faint glimmer Manlius perceived a lifeless human form, whose feet and

hands, stretched in the form of a cross, were pierced with nails, while a crown of thorns adorned the brow, and a freshly bleeding wound was visible in the side.

"So these are the terrible people who under the shelter of night hold their abominable meetings," thought Manlius, panting for breath as his hand sought the hilt of his sword; while in his excitement he fancied he saw the head of the figure nailed to the cross sink lower and lower.

The singing ceased, and after a long, soughing sound, which is the universal sigh of a devout assembly, an old man, whose snow-white beard floated far down on the breast of his black robe, came forward. Taking a cup which stood at the feet of the crucified form, he raised it to his lips and kissed it three times with devout fervour.

But instead of devotion Manlius saw an expression of loathsome bloodthirstiness in the face of the grey-haired monster,

while the penitent kneeling of the men and women seemed to him an evil, obscene movement; and the cup before which all bowed their heads, in his imagination, was filled with blood, the blood of a man murdered in a terrible manner.

The old man in a trembling voice said:

"In this cup is His blood, which was shed to bless us; this cup is the holy remembrance which effaces; this cup is the bond by which we shall be united! Worship this holy symbol, and be pure through the blood of the purest!"

Shuddering, Manlius grasped his sword-hilt, and when he saw a tall female figure clad in white, with her veil partly thrown back, approach the old man and take the cup from his hand, he tore the blade from its sheath and, frantic with horror, sprang through the square opening into the midst of the hall.

"Hold, accursed murderers!" he cried,

blinded with rage. "You apostles of sin! What are you doing here?"

Not a sound was heard in the assembly. It was prepared for such attacks. The old man answered quietly:

"We are worshipping God!"

"May you be accursed when you utter that word! You have committed deeds for which even the darkness of night is no protection. You disturb by your diabolical songs the dead resting beneath the earth; you kill human beings and force one another to drink their blood, and when your nerves are roused to execrable excitement by this blood, you extinguish your torches and commit sins whose bare thought inspires horror."

"You will repent what you have said, Manlius Sinister!" cried the clear voice of a woman standing beside the grey-beard. It was the one who had first taken the cup. Manlius started as he heard a familiar voice utter his own name,

and when the lady now threw back her veil, he beheld in amazement Sophronia's gentle, innocent face, with its mild, calm eyes, divine smile, and the hallowed power of an almost supernatural firmness.

"Sophronia!" groaned Manlius, and his drawn sword fell from his hand. Doubt took possession of his heart. He believed that he was still the sport of a terrible dream, and with heavy tongue faltered:

"Gods of Olympus, let me wake!"

"You are awake!" said Sophronia. "Look me in the face. I am Sophronia, the friend of your childhood."

"But this cup of blood——"

"Blood only for those who believe, the remembrance of blood for those who remember. Touch it with your lips."

With ill-repressed loathing Manlius tried the contents of the cup and stammered in amazement:

"This is wine." Then, in a low tone,

seized by a fear hitherto unknown, he asked: "And that dying figure?"

"Is the image of the crucified Saviour."

Manlius perceived with astonishment that it was only a painted picture.

"Do you worship a dead man?"

"A god who became man to die."

"That is impossible."

"How often the gods of Olympus assumed human form in order to enjoy pleasures whose sweetness can be experienced only by human senses. The God of Love, our God, assumed human form in order to be able to feel the sorrows which torture mankind, misery, shame, persecution, and death. The gods of Olympus became human beings to show mortals the path to hell; the God of Love, our God, became a mortal to guide us into the way to heaven! The gods of Olympus are brilliant, royal forms, who demand sacrificed victims, gold, magnificent temples, bloody hecatombs, and promise in

return long life, treasures, palaces, and blood-stained victories. The God of Love, our God, is a poor, dead form, who asks nothing except a pure heart, and promises nothing at all for this life; whose image is a symbol that, in this existence, we shall have only sorrow and suffering, but in another world joy and happiness await us——"

While these words were uttered, all who were present involuntarily bared their heads. Manlius did the same, without knowing why. The others knelt down; he, too, fell on his knees.

"I have persecuted you wrongfully," he faltered, extending his arms. "Take vengeance on me."

"The God of Love commands us to forgive our persecutors. Leave this place in peace and confidence. Though you should betray us, torture us, slay us, we will pray for you."

"May I be accursed if I do so. Never

can I leave you calmly, for you have filled my heart with unrest. The terrible words of the avenging God arrested me in my path. I read in your face the words of the all-pardoning God. Oh, give me comfort. Must I lose two heavens: one above, the other in your heart?"

"The heaven of love is closed against no one," said Sophronia, pointing upward with holy devotion.

Manlius clasped the outstretched hand, and raising it to his lips, asked with tender emotion:

"And your heart?"

"The God of Love does not forbid earthly love," replied Sophronia, with a radiant smile.

Manlius, his face glowing with happiness, sank at the young girl's feet, resting at her side like a tamed lion, while through the hall rang the hymn of joy which teaches rejoicing with those who rejoice.

A Christian but a Roman.

The grey-haired patriarch laid his hand upon the new catechumen's head, and the dying God looked in benediction upon them all.

CHAPTER III.

THE next day it was old Mesembrius' first care to send for his daughter and speak to her of Manlius, whom, of course, he praised according to his deserts.

The young girl's cheeks glowed during the conversation, and, as her face betrayed, she confessed to her father, with sincere joy, that she had long loved the young soldier.

Mesembrius could not find words to express his pleasure. He embraced Sophronia again and again, and with tears of happiness placed her in the arms of Manlius, who entered at that moment.

"My only blessing," he faltered, in tones trembling with emotion.

"O my father," said Sophronia mournfully, "do not say your only blessing. You have another daughter."

"May my curse rest upon her head. Hasten your marriage, and then go far, far away from here. So far that not even a cloud from this sky can follow you. This soil is already so laden with sins that it trembles every moment under them as if it could no longer bear the burden. Go hence, that you may not perish with the guilty. I only wish to live for the moment that I know you are happy and beyond the two seas; then, for aught I care, death or Carinus may come."

That very hour Manlius returned to Rome to set his house in order, and when he had made all the preparations for the wedding, he again mounted his horse, and late in the evening rode to old Mesembrius' villa.

It was already past midnight. The sky was covered with clouds. He could only move at a walk, when, on reaching a bridge, he saw a dark group of people coming from a side path.

It seemed to be a band of prisoners guarded by soldiers. At that time of wars with the barbarians, robbers and thieves had increased so much that they gave the prætorians uninterrupted work. Manlius supposed that he had met such a company, and quietly returned the salute of the passing soldiers.

Only one circumstance seemed strange —a woman's tall figure, with a long white mantle floating around it, rode at the end of the train. When she saw Manlius stop she stopped too, as if she expected something. They remained thus a short time, looking at each other; then they turned and rode on. It was impossible to distinguish any one's features in the darkness.

Manlius paused again, glanced back, and considered whether to return and ask some question; he did not know himself what.

But pleasanter thoughts soon occupied

his mind, and as the clouds parted, allowing a silvery streak to glide over the Tiber, his spirits also brightened, and he dashed joyously forward to the beloved home of Sophronia.

He could already see the colossal outlines of the Mesembrius villa, when he perceived in the road a magnificent *lectica*, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and hung with silk curtains, such as in those days only the most aristocratic women used in traveling. Two splendidly caparisoned sumpter mules were harnessed to the four poles, beside which marched two slaves.

Therefore the young man's surprise was so much the greater when he saw a man's ugly, pock-marked face thrust out between the curtains, and instantly recognised Ævius, the base parasite, who was ready for half a sestertia to compose a panegyric upon the last gladiator, and had prepared for Carinus Cæsar's greyhound a genealogy, according to which, on the

mother's side, it had descended directly from the she-wolf that suckled the twin brothers Romulus and Remus.

Manlius could not repress a smile at the singular situation of the panegyrist.

"Oho, Ævius, how long has the Cæsar had you carried about in a *lectica* like an aristocratic courtesan?"

"Be merciful, Manlius, and do not jeer at me. I am the most miserable writer of verse since Pegasus became the steed of poets. Just think what a favorable opportunity presented itself to secure immortality. Yesterday afternoon I learned that by the Cæsar's command a band of idol-worshipping Christians would be surprised at their meeting place on the Tiber; and I instantly hired a horse—a horse that exactly suited me, for I could not miss the chance of perpetuating so rare a spectacle by the power of my lyre for the benefit of posterity. There would be so many things priceless to us poets,

such as killing, crucifixion, boiling in pitch, and similar matters. And now how have I fared! On the way the gods of Egypt threw me into the company of an accursedly charming woman who was being borne along in this superb traveling litter. First, this woman lured my secret from me, then she lured me off my horse to sit by her side in the *vehiculum;* and with Junonian perfidy to a heaven-aspiring Ixion, she sprang out on the other side, swung herself upon my horse, which she sat with the ease of an Amazon queen, and laughing merrily gave me the advice, if I was a poet, to use Pegasus, then dashed along the road I had pointed out, leaving me in this time-killing apparatus, which is more tiresome than the hour-glass. She probably reached the scene of the spectacle in season, while I, with these two mules and two asses, lost my way so completely that I am obliged to return to Rome."

Manlius held his breath as he listened to the parasite's words.

"Who was this woman?" he asked in a hollow tone.

"Don't you know her *lectica*, Manlius? Ah, you are still a novice in Rome if you do not, and doubtless come from very distant lands where such things are not mentioned, *gelidis Scythiæ ab oris.* This is the *vehiculum* of the unaccountable and indescribable Glyceria, and the woman who outwitted me was no other than the Circe who has turned goddess, is worshipped by every one, including myself and Carinus, and who thus maltreats every one and changes her adorers, including myself and Carinus, into calves and oxen."

Manlius did not hear the poet's last words. When the name "Glyceria" reached him, he struck his heels into his horse's flanks, and as though he felt the scourge of the Furies upon him, dashed

wildly into the courtyard of the Villa Mesembrius.

The old man, without noticing the expression of rage, terror, and despair that darkened the knight's face, met him with a smile.

"Is your daughter at home?" asked Manlius, trembling in every limb, and as the old man did not answer at once, he repeated anxiously: "Where is your daughter, Mesembrius?"

The aged Senator drew the youth, who was impatiently awaiting his reply, aside, and whispered:

"I will tell you the secret, but act as though you did not know it. She is in the habit of attending the meetings of the Christians. She has gone to one now, and has not yet returned."

Manlius, trembling, raised both clenched hands heavenward, and shrieked:

"Cursed be the heaven which permitted this to happen!"

Mesembrius drew back in astonishment, asking in a tone of bewilderment: "What is the matter?"

Manlius despairingly grasped the old man's hand.

"You have been robbed of your daughter."

Mesembrius' face blanched, and sinking back into his chair he faltered with fixed eyes, "Glyceria!"

"Yes, you are right; she has robbed you of her. And I, blind fool, met them, and these eyes did not recognize her in the darkness; this pitiable heart did not feel that, five steps off, she was being borne away from me. If it could happen that the sister dragged the sister to death before the lover's eyes, what means your sovereignty, Jupiter, Ormuzd, Zeus, Zebaoth, and the rest of ye chosen kings of destiny? Fiends rule the earth, and fate is an evil omen! But I, too, will be no better. Old man, gather all your curses,

begin to pour them forth at dawn, and do not cease till nightfall. Meanwhile I will act. May Dira aid me."

The old man, as though stricken by palsy, repeated: "My daughter; oh, my daughter—"

Manlius compressed his lips; a bloody mist flickered before his eyes.

"Your daughter? I will avenge one and kill the other! May Ate be with us both.*"

As he spoke he swung himself upon his horse, and looking neither to the right nor to the left, galloped back at frantic speed to Rome.

* The goddess who avenged evil deeds.

CHAPTER IV.

Panem et circenses! was the watch-word of the Roman populace when hungry or wearied.

The nation was really in a most admirable situation. It never knew the prosaic occupation of labour. The Cæsars distributed gratis bread, wine, and oil, which were sent by the conquered provinces as tribute; and as for the games in the circus, the sovereigns strove to surpass one another in the magnificence of these entertainments.

Carinus excelled all the others by the great variety in these shows, and the reckless, extravagant splendour of their arrangement.

One day the whole arena was strewn with gold dust, so that the dust clouds whirled aloft by the hoofs of the tramp-

ling horses glittered in the sunlight; and the quirites, whose garments were covered with it, went home actually gilded.

The next day the circus, as if by magic, was transformed into a primeval forest. Giant oaks which had been brought with their roots from the mountains, leafy palms conveyed in huge casks from the coast of Africa, had been planted in the midst of the huge space, and the staring populace, who had just seen a desert covered with gold dust, had now come to admire, in the same spot, a great forest, beneath whose shade appeared the rarest animals of the South and East, from the graceful giraffe to the shapeless hippopotamus—a perfect Paradise, with trees ripening golden fruit, in whose foliage birds carolled, amid whose branches serpents twined, and beneath which wild peacocks and tame ostrichs preened their plumage.

When the people grew weary of gazing

archers came and shot the beautiful creatures. Then the forest was removed, and the next day the populace beheld in its place a sea on which whole navies fought bloody battles.

Again, in midsummer, when everyone, languishing under the scorching sunbeams, sought shelter in the shade, the people summoned to the circus saw, with surprise bordering upon terror, a winter scene.

The circus was covered with snow, which had been brought in ships and carts from the icy peaks of Noricum and Gallia, and over which hundreds of pretty sledges were gliding amid the clear ringing of little bells—a sight never before witnessed by the Romans. In the midst of the arena icebergs towered aloft, on which lay strangely formed seals, and over the surface of a round pond, where polished glass took the place of ice, skilful skaters displayed their arts. The shiver-

ing Romans wrapped their cloaks around them, wholly forgetting that drops of perspiration were trickling down their brows from the heat; and while the skaters pelted the spectators with snowballs, the audience, shouting in delight, enthusiastically cheered the Imperator who so generously provided for the amusement of his subjects.

. . . . . .

Let us now seek Carinus in his own palace. We will walk through the enormous building, which with its extensive gardens occupies the space of a whole quarter of the city. Gilded doors lead into corridors like streets, which end in a peristyle supported by pillars. In the atrium the whole court moves to and fro, slaves playing master and grooms playing senator; and the entrance to the magnificent apartments of Carinus is guarded by a brown-skinned Thracian giant.

Happy are those who can enter there!

For here man no longer walks on earth. These magnificent oval halls allow admittance neither to the light of day nor to the season of the year. Here there is neither winter nor summer, day nor night. The apartment has no windows; lamps, perpetually burning behind transparent curtains, diffuse a light whose steady glow is midway between that of the sun and moonbeams. Here the best of every season of the year is represented: the warmth of summer, which is conducted hither by invisible pipes, the ice of winter, the flowers of spring, and the fruit of autumn. Carinus never knows whether it is dawn or twilight, whether it rains or snows—with him pleasure is eternal.

There he lies among the cushions of his couch; before him is a table laden with choice viands; around him a mob of sycophants, dancers, hetæræ, eunuchs, singing women, parrots, and poets.

His face is that of a youth satiated

with every pleasure, pallid and disfigured by large red freckles; his features express the weariness of exhaustion. Only a few hairs are visible on his lips and his chin.

Two eunuchs are alternately lifting food to the Cæsar's lips, food which has already caused a violent headache, amid which a single dish has perhaps cost hundreds of thousands, yet charms the palate solely by its rarity. Carinus does not lift a finger; the corners of his mouth droop sullenly, and a motion of his eyes commands the food-bearers to eat the expensive viands themselves.

Now ideally beautiful female slaves again lift golden goblets to his mouth; but he leaves them, too, untouched till at last a Phrygian takes a sip of the spicy Cyprian wine and offers the intoxicating liquor in her rosy lips. This stirs the torpid nerves of the Cæsar, and drawing the slave toward him, he drinks from her coral mouth.

"I will marry this girl," he says, turning to one of the courtiers.

"You wedded the daughter of a proconsul yesterday, O my lord."

"I will divorce her to-day. Who is this slave's father?"

"A carpenter at the court."

"I will appoint him proconsul."

"This will be your ninth wife within four months."

Carinus drew the Phrygian down beside him and laid his head in her lap. Singing and dancing were going on around him, and Ævius, paying no heed to either, was declaiming before him. His iambics extolled with shameless flattery all the qualities which Carinus did not possess, his roseate complexion, his bold, fearless soul. He described the games with the utmost detail, and spared neither Jupiter nor Apollo, that he might laud Carinus above them.

"Alas, something oppresses and dis-

turbs me. I don't know what it is," whined Carinus.

Instantly two or three slaves were at his side, straightening his cushions, arranging his hair, loosening his garments.

"Oh, it oppresses and disturbs me still."

"Perhaps Ævius's iambics trouble you," said Marcius, the Imperator's barber.

"Perhaps so. Stop, Ævius."

The poet bowed with an humble look, though secretly bursting with rage. The barber had interrupted his finest verses.

"What is it that disturbs me still?" groaned Carinus wrathfully. "Guess! Must I think instead of you? Something irritates, something vexes me! I should like to be angry."

"I have guessed it," said the barber. "These few hairs of your beard which disfigure your glorious face and insolently tickle your majestic nose and lips are annoying you. O Carinus, have them removed! Your face is so feminine in its

beauty, and would be fairer still were it not injured by these ugly signs of manhood!"

"You may be right, Marcius," replied the youth, and allowed the hairs to be plucked out, which operation was performed by the barber with such skill that, at its close, the Cæsar appointed him prefect.

At the same moment a noise was heard outside the door. Several recognized the voice of old Mesembrius, who was trying to force his way into the imperial apartments.

Galga, the gigantic Thracian doorkeeper, held the old man back, and told him to come the next day. Carinus was asleep.

"This is the tenth time I have come here!" shouted the old man. "Once you said he was sleeping, again he was eating, the third time he was bathing, and the fourth he was not at leisure. But I *will* speak to him."

It cost Galga a hard struggle before he could force the aged Senator out of the atrium, and then it needed two or three slaves to push him through the door. Carinus was much pleased with Galga.

"Since you know how to guard my door so well, you deserve to be made Chancellor of Rome."

"And I? Do I deserve nothing, my lord?" asked Ævius in alarm.

"To you, Ævius, I will have a temple erected, in which every poet shall lay his verses upon your altar."

"I thank you, O Augustus, for the temple and the verses of beginners; but my Tusculum?"

"Surely you know on what condition I promised it."

"If by the power of my eloquence, the honey of my tongue, and the magic of my poetry, I induced that earthly goddess, Glyceria, to render you happy by her favor. Did I not bring her to you?"

"You brought her, doubtless; but what did it avail? After this bewitching phantom had kindled my love to the utmost by the sight of her charms, and lured my secrets from me, she suddenly laughed at me, thrust me from her, and left me, while I have longed for her possession a hundred times more."

"Did you not have the power to detain by force the fair demon who had entered the snare?"

"Ask my slaves what she did to them? When I commanded them to stop the accursed enchantress she seized a goblet filled with wine, muttered a few strange words of incantation, and smoke and flames instantly rose from the cup. Then, with a face that inspired terror, she turned to the slaves, crying in a ringing voice: 'Whoever does not throw himself on the floor, and remain there motionless, will be instantly transformed into a hog.' The dolts flung themselves down, and the

bold sorceress walked over their heads to the door, where she blinded Galga so that he did not recover his sight for three days. But, O Ævius, why do you compel me to talk so much? Why do you weary my thoughts and rob my tongue of its rest?"

Ævius probably thought that his own tongue was not so valuable, and began to babble: "Glorious Carinus! That woman is not worthy of your love, but of your contempt. I have discovered a far more precious treasure, beside whom Glyceria is a pebblestone beside the diamond, a shooting star beside the sun, common wine beside nectar."

"Who is it?"

"The former is a virgin, the latter already a widow. The former has not yet loved at all; the latter has learned to hate love, and the former's beauty is still more marvellous. She is a Christian maiden, who was captured a short time ago,

thrown by your order, with her companions, to the lions, and lo! the starved beasts were tamed by her glance, crouched caressingly at her feet, and licked her hands. I witnessed this with my own eyes, O Augustus, and was amazed. The guards of the animal cages took the girl from the midst of the lions, and gave her to the fiercest Illyrian legionaries. And what happened? An hour after these very soldiers were seen kneeling before her, listening with devout fervour to the words of magical power which fell from her lips; and when the tribunes attempted to take her away to deliver her to others, they defended her, and allowed themselves to be slain for her to the last man."

Carinus started from his pillows in great excitement; an unwonted fire glowed in his eyes. He pushed his last wife away from him and beckoned to Ævius:

"Let this girl be brought before me!"

The poet received the Cæsar's command with deep satisfaction, and, provided with his seal ring, hastened directly to the prison.

CHAPTER V.

SOPHRONIA had been locked in a separate cell, where she was entirely alone. The sun could reach her only through a small round window, and when it shone upon the head of the kneeling maiden, the halo of martyrdom seemed to hover around it.

A snow-white robe, fair and pure as her soul, floated around her. Her face wore an expression of supernatural repose, in which the impress of resolution alone betrayed the mortal.

The door of the dungeon opened and a tall, stately woman entered, slipping a purse of gold into the jailer's hand as he left it ajar behind her.

She was clad in a heavy silk *himation*, fastened on the shoulders by diamond

mounted fibulas; a costly anadem confined her wealth of curls, and the golden veil hanging below, in spite of the delicacy of its texture, completely shrouded her features. The draping of the folds of her robe showed refined taste, and the heavy pearls which held down the ends and corners indicated the high rank of the wearer.

Sophronia looked up as she heard the rustling of the silk, and seeing the stranger standing before her, asked in surprise:

"What do you seek here, Roman?"

The lady raised her veil, revealing a face which recalled the sublime goddesses of ancient times; a lofty brow, beautiful lips, cheeks in whose dimples Cupids were playing, and dark eyes with the deep, indescribable expression that seems to conceal all the enigmas of feeling, alluring charm and repellent sadness in every feature—a wonderful play of sorrow and

sunshine which in the sky is called a rainbow, in the human face passion.

At the first moment Sophronia shrank back at the sight of this countenance, but she instantly held out her hand with a lovely smile, saying kindly:

"Sister Glyceria!"

"Do not give me your hand," said the lady sadly. "Do not embrace me. At the first instant of recognition you started back. You were afraid of this face, and you may be right. It is four years since we have seen each other, four years during which you have heard so many curses heaped upon me by revered lips that you did not tremble without cause when you saw my features."

"I have never ceased to love you."

"I will gladly believe it, but let us not speak of that. Your new faith teaches you to love even your enemies. Fate has taught me to renounce all whom I have loved. But that is well; we have no

time to indulge in lamentations now. I have learned that the games in the circus to-morrow will be closed by the martyrdom of the Christians who are sentenced to death."

"Then let God's will be done," said Sophronia, clasping her hands on her bosom.

"No, this shall not be done! Twice already I have tried to release you, but I came too late; to-day I am in time. Change clothes with me; put on my veil. Your figure is like mine; no one will notice the difference. A trustworthy slave is waiting outside with horses. In an hour you can be clasped in the arms of your father and your lover."

Glyceria closed her eyes sadly, crushing hot tears with their lids, as if she had said: "My father, my lover!"

"And you?" asked Sophronia.

"I shall stay here."

"And the games in the circus to-morrow?"

"Will be closed with me."

"Never!" said Sophronia, filled with lofty self-sacrifice.

"Why never? Those who hate *me* love *you*, and how gladly I would give years of my life to win a smile from their lips. If one of us must die, why should it be you, whose loss will plunge them into despair? Why not rather I, whose death they would bless? You will preserve a happy life for others; I shall cast from me a wretched one."

Sophronia clasped her sister's hands in both her own, and gazed with her pure eyes deep into Glyceria's troubled, sorrowful ones.

"You were the woman who, on the night I was captured, offered me her horse to escape?"

"Why do you speak of that?"

"Do you remember my answer?"

"You said that a Christian ought not to fly from danger."

"Since then I have seen death in many forms, and I repeat it. If it is God's will that His name shall be praised by my martyrdom, let His will be done. I will accept with rapture the crown of thorns that encircled the Saviour's brow, and bless the hand which opens the door of salvation to me. Oh, death means no torture to those whose joys begin after it is over."

"But those whom you would leave behind?"

"They will see me again beyond the grave."

"To which despair will bring them. O Sophronia, listen. Two human beings who execrate me are now praying for you. If you die this terrible death, you will not meet them in the other world, for the horrors of life will hunt them down to Hades. Oh, let me die, let me be forgotten, wept by no one, blessed by no one, missed by no one. Let your

grey-haired father have two joys in a single day—my death and your life."

"A heart so embittered is not fit for death, O Glyceria!"

"Do you suppose I could not look it calmly in the face?"

"But not rapturously. To the Christian death is a new world; to the unbeliever an eternal darkness."

"May this darkness embrace me. Life only oppresses me like a burden. I do not desire to live again, but wish to pass away, to be forgotten, to rest undisturbed in a silent grave. I want to leave this brilliant chaos, whose sole reality is pain. But may you lead a long and happy life."

"O Glyceria, why should your face become so gloomy?"

"Is it not true that once there was not so great a difference between us? My soul was as radiant, my face as bright as yours. We were so much alike that even our father could scarcely distinguish us.

Nay, the object of our love was the same, and we did not conceal this from each other, but agreed that if he chose one, the other would silently resign him."

"Ah, if he had only taken you! Then we might both be happy."

"It was not my fate, O sister! The gods had not so decreed. Unknown, mysterious hands tangle the threads of human destiny, and guide them harshly through life. So who ought to be called to account for the soul? The man whose wife I became was a pitiful libertine, who appeared just at the time Manlius decided in your favour, and by producing a document which contained proof that our father was connected with a conspiracy against Carinus, forced me to become his wife."

"And therefore my father cursed you."

"May he never recall his curse. It has been fulfilled. This venal slave lost his head when the Cæsar saw me. From

that moment my life was a perpetual warfare, whose weapons were flattery and seduction. I had to defend my father constantly. All the men who breathe here are his foes! The Cæsar hates him because he will not flatter him; the courtiers hate him because he is a man of honour; the people hate him because he is rich; every criminal hates him because here virtue is considered a conspiracy against sin. I was forced to conquer all Rome, from the Cæsar to the plebeian, that I might save the grey hairs on my father's head. I attended the Imperator's orgies. I allowed myself to be applauded in the amphitheatre by the dregs of the people, and to be flattered by base courtiers. And how often I have torn up Mesembrius's death sentence after I succeeded, half by cajolery, half by force, in wresting it from the hands of spies, demagogues, senators, lictors, and even those of the Cæsar himself!"

"And this brought you my father's curses."

"He was right. It was contemptible in the daughter of a Roman patrician. Oh, he must never know it. If he should learn that he lived at such a cost, he would kill himself."

"You also discovered that the hiding place of my fellow-believers was betrayed, and hastened there in advance of the others?"

"I informed Manlius of it two days before, but he shrank from entering my house. Now there is no other way of escape save the one I offer, and thus fate will be best satisfied. She who merits death and desires it will die, and those who enjoy life and deserve it will be happy. That is right. Return to your father and to Manlius, Sophronia, and then go far, far away from here."

CHAPTER VI.

SOPHRONIA, sobbing, threw her arms around her sister's neck. In rapid alternations of feeling the shining vision of a happy life passed before her mind. She saw her loving old father who guarded her so anxiously from every breath of air; she saw the youth whose pure love promised her long years of joy in the future. The girl's strength of mind vanished before this alluring picture, and she sank on the bosom of her sister, who, with a brave though sad face, clasped her in her arms as a mythological goddess of war would embrace an angel that belonged to the realms of another deity.

"Hasten hence," she said, throwing her ample *himation* around her sister's shoulders, and fastening the golden *balteus* about her hips. "You can follow my

slave safely. No one will notice the exchange, especially amid the noisy tumult of the circus."

"No, I cannot accept this sacrifice," cried Sophronia, struggling with her own heart. "God forbids it."

"Your God is the God of Love," said Glyceria. "If on account of this God of Love you will not save yourself, I swear that this day shall long be mentioned by the world as a day of horrors. I know all the formulas, before which the beings of darkness tremble, at whose utterance the solid earth is shaken and blazing comets dash across the sky, sending down pestilences upon the living. If you sacrifice yourself to your God, I will sacrifice Rome to mine, and will destroy it so utterly that the centuries will find only fragments of its royal purple."

The pallid girl trembled in her frowning sister's arms.

The latter now quietly fastened the

anadem she had taken from her head in her sister's hair, and drew her veil over her face.

"There, now you are safe. If you are asked who rescued you, say that it was a stranger. I wish to cause no one sorrow. Never mention my name."

The weeping girl embraced her sister, from whom she could not bear to part. Glyceria herself urged her away:

"Go, hasten. Do not kiss me; it is not well to kiss me. Destruction is on my lips."

Yet Sophronia did kiss her, and at the same instant Ævius entered with the guards who accompanied him.

"We are betrayed!" shrieked Glyceria, placing herself before her sister to protect her. Then, with savage fury, she cried: "Who sent you to this place, miserable sycophant? You have made a mistake; this is a prison, not a bacchanalian revel."

"It is a golden cage, in which I find two doves instead of one."

"Put your insipid jests into rhyme, but spare me their tasteless folly. And now, go!"

"Very willingly if you will come with me; but the Augustus sent me here."

Glyceria hastily whispered to Sophronia: "Do not betray that you are my sister, or our father is lost, too."

Then she turned to the soldiers.

"Insolent knaves! Do you know me? I am the terrible Glyceria who sends down a rain of fire upon you when you are in camp, who makes the rivers overflow their banks before you, and in the midst of summer brings winter upon your bands so that you are swept away like flies? Do you no longer remember Trivius, whom in my wrath I transformed into a stag, and did not restore his human form until the hounds had torn him? Did you see before my palace the flesh-

colored caryatides, who keep guard before my door and seem to follow every passer-by with their eyes? They were slaves who disobeyed me, and whom with a single breath I transformed to stone. Do you wish to be fixed to these walls as statues, or changed into wild beasts to rend one another to-morrow in the amphitheatre? Which of you dares to raise his hand; which of you will bar my way?"

The soldiers shrank back in superstitious terror. Ævius alone stepped before her.

"Divinely beautiful woman, it would be useless trouble to transform these fellows to brutes. You ought rather to change my heart into stone, that it may have no feeling for you. But now permit me to conduct this Christian maiden to the Cæsar, who will gladly see you the next time, but now desires to behold her. Though you should vouchsafe to wreak

your utmost wrath upon my innocent head, I can do nothing else. My head and my heart are at your service, but Carinus has commanded my hands to bring this maiden before him."

Glyceria whispered impetuously to her pale-faced sister:

"Now a greater horror than death awaits you. But be strong. Under the *balteus* which I fastened around you is a sharp dagger. You are a Roman; I need say no more."

She pressed Sophronia's hand as she spoke, and without vouchsafing Ævius another glance, hastened through the ranks of the soldiers, who swiftly made way for her.

CHAPTER VII.

TREMBLING with horror, Sophronia stood on the threshold of Carinus' apartment.

The spectacle before her seemed to her eyes more terrible than the torture chambers of the prison and the dens of the wild beasts.

Drunken slaves lay on the floor, singing and touching goblets with drunken senators; men, rouged and clad in women's garments, were singing to the accompaniment of harps indecent dithyrambics, while they had twined the feminine anadem upon their heads with oak leaves, the simple ornament of civic virtue. The most prominent magistrates, consuls, prefects, tribunes, disguised as fauns and satyrs, were dancing with girls robed in transparent tissues, whose cheeks

and eyes were glowing with the unholy fires of sensual passion; and in the midst of this diabolical revel lay Carinus, himself the greatest disgrace of his own imperial purple. The effect of the wine and the emotions roused by the scenes of this orgy were visible on his face; his hair was dripping with the perfumed salves that had been rubbed into it.

Sophronia shuddered at this scene, which, wherever she turned her eyes, showed the same figures; and for the first time in her life she forgot to call upon the name of God, who is always nearest when the danger is greatest. But who could think of God's presence where the devil's altars are erected?

In trembling terror the Christian maiden seized her gold *balteus*, as it were from instinct, without remembering her sister's hint. But no sooner did she feel the hilt of the dagger in her hand than she regained her strength of soul. In an

instant she was once more the brave, resolute Roman, and without waiting to be led, she passed boldly through the circling dancers, and with her tall figure drawn up to its full height, stood proudly before Carinus.

"Is it you whom they call in Rome the Augustus?" she asked with infinite contempt.

Carinus, smiling, raised himself on his couch, and motioned to the noisy revellers to be quiet.

"Since when has the word 'Augustus' in the Roman tongue meant shame and loathsomeness?" Sophronia boldly continued, gazing defiantly at Carinus. "What accursed destiny sent you to Rome to gather around you everything that is abominable, everything that is accursed, and bring to sovereignty the sins transmitted to you from the temples of your gods? Do you not feel the trembling of the earthquake under your feet;

do you not hear the muttering of heaven's thunder? Does not the roar of millions of approaching barbarians rouse you from your slumber, that you may learn that you are not the lord, but only dust upon the earth, which at a single breath of God will pass away and become the dust which buries you?"

Carinus turned to Ævius, saying:

"By Paphia, you did not deceive me. This is a wonderful creature. There, there, beautiful maiden, rage on, be wrathful; upbraiding only heightens your beauty, and the more you reproach me the more ardent my love becomes."

"You will repent some day amid eternal flames! Above you is throned an invisible God, who reads the thoughts of your heart; and as you now see laughing faces around you, you will behold on the Day of Judgment features tortured and distorted by pain, and you yourself will not be otherwise."

"By the Pantheon! This figure is still lacking in the ranks of the gods. Ævius, bring a sculptor. Build a temple, place the statue of this goddess in it, and call her *Venus bellatrix.*"

An artist belonging to the court instantly pressed forward, seized a stylus and waxed paper, and Sophronia, with chaste indignation, perceived that while Ævius was turning her indignant words into rhyme, the sculptor was trying to catch the movements of her superb figure.

The young girl instantly stopped speaking; not another word did she utter, not a feature of her face moved.

"Hasten your work, Sextus, if you wish to sketch the *Venus bellatrix*," said Carinus. "In an hour this figure will be *Venus victa.*"

As he spoke, he glided nearer to the girl like a hungry serpent, and fixed his eyes greedily upon her face.

Sophronia stood cold and motionless as a statue.

"Well, why do you not continue to rage? Be furious! It increases the rapture that fills my heart a hundredfold; rave, curse, blaspheme. I will kiss and embrace you, and be frantic with bliss."

The patrician's daughter made no reply; not a feature stirred.

"Ah, do you seek to chill me by the coldness of your face? You doubtless perceived that the flush of shame which crimsoned it, the flames of your wrath were joy to me, and now, merely to rob me of my sweetest pleasure, you choose to behave as if shame and anger had vanished from your cheeks? Slaves, tear the garments from her limbs!"

Sophronia silently drew the dagger from beneath her girdle, and looked fearlessly around the circle of faces.

Carinus remained fixed in the attitude

in which this unexpected movement had surprised him. Every one stood still as if spellbound. Ævius alone did not lose his presence of mind. With a smooth smile on his false lips, he glided nearer to the maiden.

"Fairest virgin, do not forget that you are a Christian. Your God punishes sternly those who open the gates of death by force; and your religion regards it a sin to kill yourself or any other mortal, while it requires you to endure whatever God has decreed, whether it be death by torture or an hour of bliss in the arms of the Cæsar. Do not forget that you are a Christian, and that many Christian women have borne this form of martyrdom before you."

The drawn dagger trembled in Sophronia's hand.

Ævius moved a step nearer.

"Remember that you are a Christian," he said, casting a swift glance at the

dagger to wrest it by a bold spring from the maiden's hand.

"But I am also a Roman!" cried Sophronia, as she recalled her sister's words; and with the speed of lightning she buried the steel in her heart.

The blow was dealt with a sure hand, and the blade pierced the strong heart to its hilt. The Roman prized her honour more than her salvation.

The next instant she sank dying on the floor, composing the folds of her garments with her last strength, that even in death she might not betray the grace of her figure to unholy eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

MEANWHILE the father and the betrothed husband vainly sought the maiden. They could search only in secret: open protection, undisguised defense could not be given to Sophronia.

Old Mesembrius had not been seen in Rome for a long time, and therefore every one was surprised when the distinguished patrician again appeared in the Forum, leaning on his ivory crutches and pausing at every step.

"Ah, worthy Senator, you rarely show yourself in Rome," said a perfumed patrician dandy. "Since the death of Probus we have not seen you even once."

"I am old and feeble, my good Pompeius. My feet will scarcely carry me,

and I should not have recognised you had you not spoken to me, for my eyes are almost blind."

"But why do you not live in Rome?"

"If you should see the splendid turnips I raise in my garden, you surely would not summon me to Rome. An old man like me interests himself only in his apricot slips."

At this moment a messenger from the Capitol whispered to Pompeius:

"Carinus has laid aside the purple in favor of his brother Numerian."

Mesembrius sometimes heard so well that he caught the faintest murmur.

"What did you say?" he eagerly exclaimed. "Carinus has abdicated, and Numerian will be Imperator? Huzza! Huzza!"

"Do you know Numerian? What kind of a man is he?" asked the courtiers anxiously.

"What kind of a man? He is a hero,

a Roman, under whose rule Rome's golden age will begin again and the sun of fame will again shine upon us. The glorious battles which Rome fought against half the world Numerian will continue. We will all share them. A new and radiant epoch is dawning. I will swing myself upon my charger and be where every man of honour must appear. I am not yet too old to die in battle!"

The old man, frantic with joy, was gesticulating enthusiastically, without thinking of his crutches, and recognised an acquaintance coming from the direction of the Capitol at a distance of a hundred paces. This was Quaterquartus, the augur.

"You are from the Capitol, Quaterquartus? Well! Well! What is the news?"

"What I predicted," replied the augur with dignity. "The Senate would not accept the abdication, and compelled the

immortal Carinus to continue to wear the purple."

Mesembrius was obliged to lean on his crutches again.

"Oh, my poor feet! Oh, this terrible gout in my knees! Foolish old man that I am; what have I been saying? I swing myself on a horse? If I could at least sit comfortably in my wheel-chair! Such a foolish old fellow! How could I go to war when I see so badly that I cannot distinguish friend from foe? Laugh at me, my dear friends; laugh at such a silly old man. Oh, my feet——"

And, groaning painfully, he dragged himself forward. Then Manlius met him.

"Have you learned anything?" he asked.

"To-morrow I will force myself into Carinus's presence. And you?"

"I will seek Glyceria."

"That you may kill her ere she can speak."

"Have no anxiety. Even if she could use magic arts, she would die. We will meet in Carinus's atrium to-morrow. Be provided with a good sword."

. . . . . .

Manlius went to the *Pons Sacer*.

Before the statue of Triton sat the old woman who had given him the ring. When she saw Manlius she rose and went to meet him.

"Have you the ring with you, my lord?" she asked.

"Look at it."

"Will you go with me?"

"That is the purpose of my coming here."

"I have waited for you four days. Why did you not appear sooner?"

"Pleasure never comes too late," replied Manlius bitterly, and allowed himself to be conducted through gardens, byways, and covered passages till his guide opened a small bronze gate, and

taking him by the hand, led him through a dark corridor into a circular hall, adorned with pillars and lighted by a single round window above.

Here the old woman left him and went to summon her mistress.

Manlius looked around him. He had imagined the apartment of a Roman lady an entirely different room. He had expected to see jasper columns, garlanded with climbing plants, fountains perfumed with rose water, representations of frivolous love scenes, an atmosphere saturated with heavy fragrance, purple couches, and silver mirrors, and instead he found himself in a lofty, noble, temple-like hall, whose walls were adorned with masterly pictures of battles and heroes, while in the centre stood the marble bust of a bald-headed old man.

"Perhaps Glyceria does not even live here," he thought, and just at that moment heard his name uttered behind him.

He turned. Before him stood a pale, slender woman, in a simple snow-white robe, whose folds concealed her figure up to her chin and covered her arms to the wrists. This was not the alluring costume that suited a love adventure. The face was still less seductive. Deep, despairing, consuming grief, that blight of beauty, was expressed in every feature.

Manlius recognised Glyceria. His blood rushed feverishly to his temples, and he convulsively clutched the hilt of his sword. Yet he did not wish to kill her thus. He thought that this, too, was only a new variety of the arts of temptation in which women are such adepts. When a libertine is to be attracted, the graces are called to aid; if it is a hero, Minerva must be summoned to help. Clothes, moods, will correspond with the character of the chosen individual; nay, even the features will be altered so that they will appear different to every one.

He could not kill her while she looked so sad; he must await the moment when she began to speak to him of her love to thrust his sword into her heart at the first yearning smile.

Pausing with drooping head, three paces from Manlius, the lady faltered almost too low for him to hear:

"You have come late. Very late."

Manlius, with suppressed fury, answered:

"Is love a fruit that becomes overripe if it waits long?"

Glyceria looked at Manlius in horror.

"What is the matter with you that you speak to me of love?"

"Did you not summon me that we might whisper together of rapture, bliss, and sweet delights?"

"Once your words would have given me pleasure; now horror seizes me when you speak in this way."

"Are you not convinced that your

beauty has such magic power that every man who beholds you forgets every woman he has ever seen?" replied Manlius, half drawing his sword from its sheath.

Glyceria looked into the youth's face as though she were gazing into impenetrable darkness, and asked:

"Even the one who is lying dead at this moment?"

Manlius started back, his breath failed, his face grew corpselike in its pallor. He strove to pronounce Sophronia's name, but his lips would not form the word, and staggering back, he was obliged to lean against a pillar.

Glyceria went toward him, her staring eyes fixed upon his face as if she wished to read his inmost soul.

"Manlius Sinister!" she said calmly. "My dreams have told me that you will kill me, and I know that the hand beneath your chlamys is clutching your sword-hilt. That will be no grief to me.

My anguish is that you see in me your promised wife's murderess."

Manlius sighed heavily, and a secret shudder shook his whole frame. In a voice that seemed to come from the grave, he asked:

"How was she killed? Was she torn by wild beasts? Or did greedy flames devour her tender body? Speak, Hetæra. Tell me clearly and minutely how she was tortured to death. I *will* hear."

"She was not dragged to the scenes of torture, but to Carinus' orgies."

"Ah!" shrieked Manlius in unutterable fury, covering his face. Then, removing his hands, he said quietly: "Go on; omit nothing. Describe step by step the outrage, and in what way my idol was dragged through the mire. Speak!"

"Nothing of that kind happened. A Roman woman, who wished to rescue her, exchanged garments with her in the prison; and when this plan was baffled, she

concealed a dagger in Sophronia's girdle and the girl killed herself before any man's hand touched her."

Tears streamed from the young soldier's eyes; his sword fell from his hand.

"Ye gods, bless that Roman woman for the sake of the dagger. Do you not know who it was?"

"She does not wish you to be told."

Manlius drew a long breath, as if relieved from a heavy burden.

"I thank you for these tidings."

There was something terrible in this gratitude.

"The danger is not yet over," Glyceria began again. "Carinus, whose pallid face was sprinkled with the martyr's blood, sank back upon his couch half fainting, and through his trembling soul flashed the thought: If a woman could die in this way, how will her father or her promised husband—kill! No one

knew Sophronia; but my father's presence in Rome has already attracted attention, and although he makes no public search, people are beginning to suspect that the dead girl was his daughter. You will both be summoned before Carinus tomorrow; he will ask if you can recognise a dead woman who was found murdered in the Christians' prison, and Sophronia will be shown to you. Be hard-hearted at that moment, Manlius; let no tears fill your eyes when you behold this corpse. Say that you do not know it, wear an indifferent face; for if you betray yourself, you will lose your head."

"I am to wear an indifferent face," said Manlius, with dilated eyes, "and not recognise her when she lies dead before me? I am to say that I have never seen her?"

"Do you imagine that Carinus would suffer a man to live whose promised wife had killed herself on the Cæsar's account?"

"You are right," said the knight, bitterly. "Manlius will learn to dissimulate."

He burst into a terrible laugh.

Glyceria sank on her knees before him, and offering him her beautiful bosom, stammered, sighing:

"And now—take your sword—begin with me."

Manlius smiled.

"So your dreams have predicted that I shall kill you? You are beautiful, Glyceria; really marvellously beautiful. Is it true, as people say, that Carinus loves you ardently?"

"Still more ardently do I hate him. Why do you ask?"

"Because I should like to know whether you have ever rendered Carinus happy by your favour?"

"Never even with a smile."

"And yet he would gladly give years of his life for a single night with you."

"Ah, by Styx! If I should grant him a night, it would be an eternal one!" cried Glyceria, drawing herself to her full height while her face crimsoned.

Manlius went up to her and clasped her hand.

"Now you see, Glyceria, that your dreams deceived you, for I shall not kill you. No, I shall not kill you, but will make you my wife."

Glyceria drew back her hand in horror.

"Manlius, this is mockery, and bitterer than death."

"No, it is only love. I love you."

"Manlius, do not kill me thus, not thus. Rather with the sharp sword."

"I love you. If I loved your sister, I now see her features in your face; and when grief for her loss tortures me, I must fly to you to find consolation. I do not believe aught of all the world says of you; I will take the past from you and

make you what your sister has been. I will lead you back to your father, and he will bestow upon you the blessing he gave your sister. I will endow you with everything that was her property. You will wear her simple garments and even assume her name, and I will call you my Sophronia."

Glyceria, trembling violently, escaped from the youth's arms as he drew her toward him with gentle violence, and with glowing cheeks and panting bosom, fled without answering these bewildering words.

Manlius, looking after her, muttered under his breath:

"Cannot I play the hypocrite too?"

CHAPTER IX.

As Glyceria had learned through her spies, Manlius was summoned by the lictors to Carinus' presence that very day. But instead of waiting for the command, he went to the palace before he received it.

Instead of his plain military costume he had donned the ample flowered silk toga worn by the fashionable dandies of the time, rubbed his hair with perfumed ointments, loaded his fingers with gems, adorned his ankles with circlets, and even ornamented his toes with rings which glittered between the thongs of his sandals, while he had scattered little red spots over his face till it looked as freckled as the Cæsar's. So, with an indolent, loitering step and a coquettish carriage of

the head, he entered the vestibule of the imperial palace, which was already swarming with courtiers similarly attired, who gazed enviously at the youth's unusually magnificent costume—only they could not understand why he had painted freckles on his face. Manlius bowed to the floor before Carinus—a form of salutation which had been transplanted to Rome from the Persian court. Even Ævius was forced to admit that no one understood how to bow with so much humility as Manlius. Then, seizing a corner of the imperial mantle, he kissed it with the devout fervour which only the most pious Jews show in kissing the thora.

Carinus wished to appear stern.

"You have already been in Rome four days, and this is the first time you have come to me," he said reproachfully.

"O glorious Augustus," replied Manlius in an inimitably sweet tone; "I have

already been ten times in your atrium to deliver the news I bring from Asia, but I learned as often that you were enjoying the delights envied by the gods, and I am not one of those rude soldiers who recklessly force their way in with their messages of supposed importance, and rob you of hours of bliss which can never be regained."

"Good. You are a man of worth; but what tidings do you bring from Persia?"

"There is no life anywhere in the world, O Augustus, except where you are. All the lands of the earth exist only to make the contrast between them and Rome the sharper. I will not weary you with tiresome tales of war and battles. Wars merely serve to lessen the number of dissatisfied people, so why should I disturb your repose with my descriptions?"

"You are right, Manlius. Speak of other things."

"My experiences are at your command. I saw the marvels of Barbarian lands, and always thought of you. In Africa I saw horses whose shining skins were streaked with stripes, animals whose like no Imperator has ever shown in our circus games. I left orders with the commandant of Alexandria to send several of them to you. In the Indian seas a kind of snail was discovered, which fastened itself to the rocks by means of threads as fine as a cobweb. From these threads the people there manufacture a fabric even more brilliant than *sericum*, and I brought a *velamen* of it for you, such as only the princes of that country wear."

As he spoke, Manlius gave the Imperator a superb textile which he had brought with him from India in the hope that it would be Sophronia's bridal veil.

The Cæsar was filled with admiration at the sight of the unusually brilliant, delicate texture.

"Manlius, I appoint you Senator."

The courtiers began to stare enviously at Manlius. As the barber, who was the most jealous of any sign of favour from the Cæsar, could find no fault with the *velamen*, he vented his anger upon Manlius' face.

"Where did you get those freckles, Manlius? You look as if the flies had played an evil trick with your features."

"You are a barber, Marcius. I painted these freckles. It is a very aristocratic fashion which I learned at the court of Persia."

"Is it the fashion there to wear freckles?" asked Carinus, whose cheeks Marcius was in the habit of painting white and pink.

"Only among the aristocrats. It is the distinguishing mark between the dignitaries of the kingdom and the common people. True, it requires a more refined taste than yours, Marcius, to appreciate this;

one must understand, too, why and in what degree these freckles embellish the face. The empty, smooth face, like yours, for instance, which, when one looks at it, shows only white and pink, is the beauty of the plebeian; Apollo's countenance is freckled."

Manlius knew that Carinus liked to be called Apollo.

The courtiers were horrified at this bold assertion.

"I repeat that Apollo's face is adorned with freckles. For Apollo's image is the sun, and is not the sun itself full of spots? Is not the sky strewn with stars, and are not the stars the freckles of the sky, as freckles are the stars of the human face? Therefore, O Marcius, do not censure this magnificent taste of mine."

Carinus motioned to his barber to remove the paint from his face.

"Divine countenance!" cried Manlius rapturously. "O you profaners of the

sanctuary, who conceal the freckles which the graces have scattered with lavish generosity over these features. Come, friends, let this face be the model of ours."

And the courtiers instantly sat down in turn before Marcius and had freckles painted on their faces that they might resemble Carinus.

From that moment it was the fashion in Rome to have freckles painted on the face.

"Manlius," said the Cæsar, "I appoint you Prefect of Rome."

All the imperial favourites were supplanted by the young Tribune.

Ævius was in despair.

"To what shall I henceforth compare the Cæsar in my poems, since roses and lilies are no longer beautiful?" he wailed.

"Compare him to the royal panther," Manlius advised. And the poet was content.

At this moment Mesembrius arrived,

and hearing in the atrium that Manlius had already entered, hastened after him.

On the threshold he caught a glimpse of the young soldier and started back.

"Is that actor Manlius?" he asked himself, gazing at his silk toga and freckled face. "Have you seen Glyceria?" he whispered.

"Yes," replied Manlius.

"Have you killed her?"

"No."

"Then I understand the change. Hitherto only caterpillars became butterflies; in you a lion has undergone the change. I pity you."

The old Senator, as he spoke, moved forward with dignified bearing and, leaning on his crutches, stood before the Augustus.

"Augustus Carinus, I have come to bring a charge, or, if it pleases you better, to beseech a favour. I had an only daughter——"

"You have another," interrupted Ævius.

"I say I had an only daughter. She was the joy of my life, the prop of my old age. Allured by a new religion, this girl and her companions were captured at the meeting place of the Christians. I will not argue with you over matters of belief, Carinus, but I entreat you to listen to the petition of a man who has grown grey in the service of Rome, and restore my only child."

Carinus raised himself indolently from his *lectisternium* and whispered a few words to his eunuch. Then he turned to Mesembrius.

"Senator, we do not know whether your daughter is among the captured Christians; had we been aware of it we should have delivered her up to you long ago. She was beautiful, you said?"

"I did not say so, O Lord."

"I have so understood. But unfortunately I must inform you that a beauti-

ful girl in this band of Christians killed herself last night in prison."

"That was not my daughter. Sophronia could not forget her grey-haired father, whom her loss would drive to despair."

"Look at the corpse, Senator, and if it is not your daughter, which from my heart I hope, I will have her brought here at once and she can then return with you."

Mesembrius was so startled by this unexpected favour that he forgot to express his thanks for it.

The eunuch returned, followed by two slaves, who bore on a bier a corpse covered with a large pall.

Ævius drew it from the body.

Mesembrius pressed his hand upon his heart; the blood rushed to his temples; his breath failed; he could not move; he stood motionless for a time, then, with a wild cry of anguish, flung himself upon the lifeless form.

"My child! My dear, dear child!"

"So I have him to fear, too," murmured Carinus.

Sobbing aloud, Mesembrius embraced the beautiful, beloved body. Death had restored to the face the repose, the supernatural loveliness which had been peculiar to it in life. It seemed as though she were sleeping and at a call would wake.

"Oh, my dear, sweet child," sobbed the old man; "why must you leave me here? If you were resolved to die, why did you not appear to me in a dream, that I might have followed you? What have I to love in this world now that you are no more? What is to become of me, an old withered tree, whose only blossoming branch has been cut off? Have you no longer one word, one smile for me? Once you were so gay, so full of cheerful converse—oh, why must I endure this?"

The father turned neither to the Cæsar

nor to the courtiers; he gave free course to his tears, burying his face in his dead daughter's winding-sheet.

But gradually he seemed to realise that he was weeping alone, and his dim eyes wandered around the apartment with a vague consciousness that there must be some one else here who owed to Sophronia's manes the tribute of tears.

There stood Manlius, with a cold, unsympathising face, talking to Carinus. Not a feature betrayed the slightest sorrow.

Mesembrius indignantly grasped the youth's arm.

"And have *your* eyes no tears, when your bride lies murdered before you?"

Seized with suspicion Carinus suddenly looked at Manlius; the courtiers, with malicious pleasure, turned toward him.

"My bride?" asked Manlius, in a tone of astonishment. "Your mind is wandering, old Mesembrius."

"Have the Furies robbed you of your reason that you no longer remember that, but three days ago, you asked for my daughter's hand and I gave it to you?"

"Your daughter's hand, certainly," replied Manlius, with unshaken calmness. "Not this daughter's here, however, but Glyceria's."

"May you be accursed!" shouted Mesembrius, with savage fury, and without heeding the Cæsar, his dead daughter, or the danger threatening him, he rushed out of the hall like a madman.

This very thing saved him.

"Follow him, Galga!" shouted Carinus. "Seize him. This man's head must be laid at my feet."

Meanwhile Mesembrius rushed through the palace. The throng of slaves shrank back in terror at the sight of his agitated face, and allowed him to reach the open air. His frantic words instantly gath-

ered a crowd around him, and by the time Galga, at the head of a troop of mounted prætorians, went in pursuit of him, the mob had attained threatening proportions. But the Thracian giant dashed recklessly through the masses of people. As he stretched his arm from the saddle to seize the old man's head and sever it from the trunk with a single stroke of his sword, the Roman, with strength wholly unexpected in a man of his age, dealt the brown-skinned colossus such a blow with his heavy crutch that he fell from his horse with a shattered skull. Mesembrius swung himself into the saddle at a bound, and led the infuriated populace against the armed cohort, which was scattered in a moment, and before reinforcements arrived to quell the tumult, the old patrician had disappeared and was never found.

CHAPTER X.

MANLIUS remained with Carinus to amuse him; he taught the dancing girls the dazzling arts of the Indian bayaderes, and conquered Ævius by producing on every occasion, and at every toast, distiches more apt and beautiful than the court poet could fabricate.

During a single evening Carinus gave the now universally envied favourite a hundred thousand sestertiæ, and, when he learned from him that the Teutonic women, by means of a special kind of soap, dyed their hair amber-yellow, he promised Manlius to appoint him Governor of Gallia that he might send him some of this soap which turned the hair yellow—at that period a hue ridiculously fashionable in the aristocratic society of Rome.

The banquet lasted a long time. True, it was only afternoon out of doors, but any one who did not know that the feast had begun in the morning would have supposed it was already midnight.

Carinus poured the wine that remained in the drinking horn upon the floor, in token that he drank some one's health, and then handed it to Manlius.

"To the health of the beautiful Glyceria!"

"And to yours, Carinus," replied Manlius, giving his own in exchange.

"Manlius," said Carinus, the blood mounting to his face, "do you know that I have already had one husband of Glyceria slain?"

"You did well, Carinus; but for that I could not become the second."

"Do you know why I had him killed?"

"Because he concealed his wife from

you. Fool! Have the gods created a sun that some one may take possession of it and allow others no share in its light? Those who snatch a beautiful woman from the world, and then demand that she shall be loved by no one else, are thieves and robbers!"

"It might seem strange to you, Manlius, if I should take you at your word. You must know that I love your wife madly."

"That is your affair, Carinus. I do not keep her locked up. The way to her is open to every one."

"It is easy for you to play the magnanimous. She herself secludes herself sufficiently. While hundreds of thousands of men tremble at a wave of my hand, all my power cannot win the love of this one woman."

"And how Glyceria *can* love! Ah, Carinus, I know that when, in the evening, the door opens to me which you al-

ways find closed, you would joyfully permit me to occupy your throne and reign in your stead so long as you fill my place as bridegroom."

Carinus sprang up as if an electric spark had thrilled him.

"*Hecatæa!* I will take you at your word! Take my throne, command my slaves, my empire in my name, have my favourites killed, make the lowest in Rome the highest, empty my treasure-houses, and, for all this, merely give me the key of your bridal-chamber."

"The bargain is made; here is my hand. Give me the parchment and stylus. Listen to what I write to Glyceria, and send it to her dwelling: 'Goddess of my love! I shall spend the hours between evening and morning with you. My heart longs for your words of consolation. The cypress-branch has wounded my brow; your rose-wreath may subdue its flames. When the evening star, the

lamp of lovers, begins to shine, extinguish yours that, if tears should dim my eyes, you may not see them, but only feel my kisses. Until dawn I shall be with you, and in possession of my happiness. Your languishing husband, Manlius Sinister.' Send this letter by a slave, and put on this ring, which you must show at the door. Then you will be admitted, and Glyceria's women will conduct you where she awaits you."

Carinus listened greedily to every word from Manlius, who coolly handed him the ring and the letter. Trembling in every limb, he could not speak, but motioned to a slave to deliver Manlius' letter to Glyceria.

The courtiers whispered together in astonishment.

"What a fortunate man you are," Ævius whispered in the ear of the new favourite. "Why did not I have the good luck to possess Glyceria's love, that I

might cast it from me with the same indifference?"

The slave soon returned with a letter from Glyceria to Manlius.

The latter handed it to the Cæsar:

"It is yours; read it!"

Carinus, with trembling hands, unrolled the parchment; his eyes sparkled as he read:

"Manlius! Your lines quiver in my hand. A thousand emotions are raging in my heart; fear, longing, holy horrour, and wild love. I am under the ban of an irresistible spell. I wish you might not come, but if you do, I shall be unable to resist you. I feel within my breast the power and the desire to destroy the whole world, but at a breath from you all my strength fails; I am nothing more than a weak, loving woman, who loses her reason in her love. Oh, do not come! Glyceria."

"That means: 'Oh, come!'" said Man-

lius laughing, propping himself carelessly on one elbow upon his couch.

Carinus ordered his *lectica* to be brought, and had himself lifted into it.

"No man has ever done that," whispered the barber, filled with envy; "given up his own bride to another."

"Meanwhile you are the ruler of Rome," said Carinus to Manlius. "Let the fellow who writes my name come. Whatever you command, I command. Reign over my kingdom."

"And you over my heaven."

The slaves closed the purple curtains of the *lectica*, raised it on their shoulders, and withdrew with the Cæsar.

The trembling courtiers, with humble faces, gathered around the youth whom the Imperator's crazy whim had made for an hour the master of the world.

Manlius stretched himself comfortably upon the cushions of the imperial couch, sought among the throng of courtiers the

man who was trembling most violently, and beckoned to him.

It was Marcius, the barber; by virtue of imperial favour, Præfectus Prætorio.

"You are the commander of the prætorians?" asked Manlius.

"Yes, my imperial master," stammered the barber, rolling his eyes.

Manlius laughed.

"So you really consider me the Cæsar? If I *were* the Imperator, I would have you beheaded because you mocked at my face; but call me your friend. I know your merits."

"O my Lord!"

"I know, and will reward them. You are accustomed to bleed people, so you will make a good soldier; you are skilled in arranging the hair, which indicates your talent for commander-in-chief; and understand how to pluck out hairs coolly, from which I perceive that you are stern and impartial. I am not satisfied with

the leaders of the army in the East, Numerian and Diocletian, and I therefore appoint you general of these troops. You will set out at once for Thrace. Honourable *Defraudator!* Sign our name to the document."

Marcius's brain fairly reeled under the burden of his new dignities.

The courtiers were rigid with astonishment, and calculated that if Manlius began to reward thus those who had mocked him, he would perhaps raise to the very heavens those who had looked at him with smiles. The appointment was made out. The secretary signed the Cæsar's name, and Marcius, with a very important face, retired at once, carrying his commission.

Urged by envy and jealousy, Ævius pressed forward to Manlius. The latter saw his struggle and beckoned to him.

"You will be Præfectus Prætorio in Marcius's place, and distribute four thou-

sand talents among this valiant band, whose sole duty consists in guarding our person. To be able to reward these men richly continually, we will lessen the numbers of the outside army. Why should we keep foreign countries garrisoned with our legions, pay Roman gold for Roman steel, and give the leaders opportunity to rebel against us? In an hour you will depart for Thrace, bearing our command to Numerian and Diocletian to dismiss half the army at once, and the sum thus saved I place at your free disposal, my noble friends. Write down my words, honourable *Defraudator!*"

A frantic shout of joy greeted Manlius' speech. The courtiers rushed to him, raised him on their shoulders, and amid the accompaniment of music and thundering cheers, bore him around the room. The fury of intoxication had risen to madness, Senators were no longer

to be distinguished from actors, dancers and hetæræ, slaves and bacchantes mingled in the hall, wine flowed from the skins upon the floor, the lamps were extinguished with it, and darkness covered the foul scene.

The only window in the apartment was a round one in the ceiling which admitted the fresh air. When the last lamp was extinguished, the senseless revellers saw with terror that the window above their heads now gave light. What if the sky had kindled into terrible flames to illumine with its awful glare the hell beneath!

The horrible tumult of the orgy ceased as if by magic, and through the doors, suddenly flung wide open, rushed a slave, calling in a trembling voice the message of terror:

"Save yourselves! Rome is burning!"

Through the round window the crimson glow shone like the flames of the

Day of Judgment upon the evil beings caught in the midst of their sins.

. . . . .

When Carinus showed the ring, he was conducted without delay to Glyceria's apartments.

The palace already stood wrapped in silence and darkness. Carinus felt rustling garments brush him in the corridors, soft hands guided him and, amid low laughter, led him through quiet rooms until at last he clasped a hand at whose electric pressure his blood began to seethe, and a familiar voice faltered with a tenderness never heard before:

"Manlius! So you came?"

It was Glyceria—cruelly deceived Glyceria.

"I expected you, and yet I hoped you would not come," she whispered softly. "Do you feel the tremour of my hand in your clasp? It is quivering with love and fear. Love robbed me of my senses.

One word of tenderness from your lips made my soul your slave—all that, during my whole life, I had concentrated in a single thought, the goal of my longing which I had never hoped to possess, the joy of which I had always dreamed, but never hoped would be mine—I now embrace! I do not understand it. This is not the day or the hour in which we ought to speak of love, but you mentioned it, and can the woman who loves choose the hour for answering the question?"

Carinus stole the caresses of the loving woman.

"Yet, O Manlius! I trembled lest you might come only to mock me, only to play a cruel game with me, obtain the deepest secrets of my heart and then jeer at me for them. No. You cannot do that. You cannot trample in the dust the only feeling which I have kept unsullied amid the ruin of my life. Can

you hate me because I love you? And if you hate me, would you not slay, rather than mock me?"

Carinus silently drew the trembling figure toward him and covered her cheeks and lips with fervent kisses.

Glyceria, in blissful delusion, yielded to his embrace, and in her happiness had almost silenced the warning voice in her heart, when Carinus' cheek suddenly touched hers, and she discovered that his face was beardless.

The most terrible thought darted through Glyceria's brain.

"Ha! Who are you? You are not Manlius. Be accursed! You are Carinus."

And, wresting herself with the strength of despair from the Cæsar's arms, she rushed toward the opposite side of the room and disappeared behind the curtains of the niche which concealed her couch, drawing the heavy folds together and hastily fastening the cords.

"You will not escape me!" shrieked Carinus, dashing in the fury of his passion toward the curtains, and tearing them down, while he tore apart the knot which confined the cords with his teeth.

But these few seconds had sufficed for Glyceria to light a vessel filled with some inflammable fluid and, at the instant Carinus succeeded in forcing the curtains apart, she poured the flaming contents over her couch and, while the blaze caught the light draperies, she herself sprang with a single bound upon the bed, now burning around her, whence like a terrible, destroying vision she shouted to the terror-stricken Augustus:

"Now, come!"

The next moment the hall was wrapped in flames. Like the fiend who gained an entrance into Heaven and was forced to fly thence, Carinus fled from the destroying fire, while Glyceria, seizing a burning coverlet, rushed from room to room, set-

ting fire to each, and, dragging costly garments into the main hall, kindled those too.

In a few minutes the whole palace was in flames and, at the end of an hour, a sea of fire was rolling through Rome.

Carinus had been borne back to his palace senseless.

Glyceria fled that same night to the temple of Cybele.

CHAPTER XI.

WHILE in Rome pleasures alternated with horrors the troops commanded by Numerian marched over rough roads, amid severe privations, to the Bosporus. Here they were joined by the fugitive Mesembrius who, when he left Rome, fled directly to Numerian.

No one had been able to see this noble Cæsar for several weeks. He suffered severe pain in his eyes, and did not leave his tent. Mesembrius made his complaint to the leaders next in command. One, Diocletian, promised to avenge him, while the second, Aper, referred to Numerian and refrained from giving any opinion of his own.

"Then let me go to Numerian; if I speak to him, he will be the first to draw

his sword against his brother," urged the Senator.

"You cannot see him," replied Aper, placing himself before the entrance to Numerian's tent. "No one except myself is allowed to speak to him during his illness. He even gives his orders to the army through me alone."

Mesembrius sniffed the air suspiciously.

"Why does so strong a smell of musk and amber come from this tent?"

"Why?" repeated Aper, his face blanching. "Why do you desire to know, Senator?"

"What?" retorted Mesembrius; "because you lie, Aper, when you say that Numerian issues his orders through you."

"What? What do you mean?" shouted the soldiers who had gathered around the two.

"I mean that Numerian is no longer living!" cried Mesembrius in ringing

tones. "No, no, the strong odour of amber issuing from his tent is only to disguise the scent of corruption, and Aper has long taken advantage of you by issuing orders in Numerian's name."

The soldiers forced their way into Numerian's tent and found the old man's words confirmed. Numerian had lain dead a long time; his body was far advanced in decomposition.

Aper was instantly put in chains by the soldiers on account of this deception; in the afternoon an empty throne was erected in the open fields for the election of a new Imperator.

Mesembrius walked through the ranks of the legions, recommending Diocletian, whom the soldiers fairly forced to take his seat upon the throne.

Then Aper was brought forward.

"I charge you, publicly and plainly," said Mesembrius, "with having murdered Numerian and betrayed us to Carinus."

"And we condemn you," roared the army with one voice.

"And I execute the sentence," said Diocletian, stabbing with his own hand the prisoner sentenced by the troops.

In the midst of this wrathful mood Marcius arrived with the order given to him by Manlius and, without knowing what had happened, he delivered his appointment to the new Cæsar.

"Who is this?" asked Diocletian, turning to Mesembrius.

"The Cæsar's barber."

Diocletian turned smiling to the soldiers.

"Friends! Carinus provided for our beards and sent us a barber with the rank of an Imperator; pray sit down before him and have yourselves shaved. But do you take care not to cut my soldiers' faces, my little friend, for if they should try their big razors on you, you would fare ill."

The soldiers, amid loud shouts of laughter, dragged Marcius off with them, and made him shave their bristling beards.

Scarcely an hour later Ævius arrived with the command to dismiss half the army at once.

This enraged the Cæsar and the whole body of troops. To assail their interests so boldly was presumptuous even from the Imperator.

"To the funeral pyre with the messenger and his message!" cried Diocletian, and the poet had already been bound to the huge pile of logs when he sighed bitterly:

"O ye gods, must I, while still living, witness my own apotheosis?"

Diocletian laughed at the idea and ordered the poet to be brought down from the funeral pyre, contenting himself with putting him in the pillory, after which he sent him back to Rome

with a message declaring war against Carinus.

. . . . . .

The thunderstorm was rising, though as yet it sent forth no lightning.

In Rome it was openly stated that the army sent to the West, filled with mortal hatred of Carinus, had already reached the Ister, only nothing was said of it in the Cæsar's palace. There revelry was perpetual and if, from time to time, any one alluded to Diocletian's approach, he was pitilessly derided.

"Who is this peasant?" asked Manlius. "Who ever heard his name among the patricians of Rome? Who knew his father? His mother, on the contrary, was known by many. She was a slave in the house of Senator Anulinus. Anulinus has a right to demand him as a fruit of his household."

The courtiers laughed at the jest.

"You must know him, Manlius?"

"I have never seen him. I used to be where danger threatened, and I never saw Diocletian. I know him because I was told that he always led the rearguard when we were marching forward, and the vanguard when we were retiring."

Peals of laughter greeted the words.

"And what is the character of his army?" he was asked.

"It is a valiant, obedient body. It has killed three of its Imperators. As for its courage and fearlessness, it is peerless in those qualities, for it retreated from the banks of the Tigris without having seen an enemy. When I tell you that I myself was the greatest hero among them, you can judge of the rest."

"And your news of victories?"

"Were two-thirds inventions. Although we sometimes gained one, we owed it to our superior numbers; but the army must now be greatly reduced by desertion and disease."

This sycophantic nation liked nothing better than to hear the soldiers slandered, and therefore Manlius even slandered himself.

When Diocletian's army approached so close, however, that there could no longer be any doubt as to the danger, the imperial generals urgently pressed the Imperator to prepare for war, and Carinus gathered his troops from the European provinces.

Suddenly the rumour spread that Carinus would command his army in person. He could be seen at two military exercises, the reviews of the troops. Manlius was always at his side, constantly stimulating his vanity or his jealousy by entreating him not to leave the victories to his leaders or commit the course of the campaign to their knowledge and prudence.

"The victorious general is a new foe," Manlius was in the habit of saying, and

the Imperator assumed the chief command of the assembled forces, and produced no bad effect mounted on his grey charger and clad in a suit of gold armour, with a purple striped violet mantle floating around his shoulders.

On the day before the departure of the army, the leaders went to all the temples in turn, offering sacrifices everywhere, even on the altars of the Egyptian gods. Manlius assisted in bringing the animals selected for victims to the haruspex.

The populace listened in solemn devotion to the augur's words.

Quaterquartus extended his arms and, with closed eyes, said, in deep tones:

"This battle will ruin the enemy of Rome."

True, he did not say whom he considered the enemy of Rome—whether Diocletian or Carinus.

At last the imperial procession reached Cybele's temple. Amid a deafening up-

roar of drums and blaring trumpets, the frantic priestesses were dancing in the open portico, stabbing their bodies with knives, muttering with foaming lips incomprehensible words, and whirling around till, overcome by giddiness, they fell to the floor.

Suddenly a shriek, shriller, more terrible than any other sound in this inharmonious uproar, rang above the din; a shriek so piercing, so heart-rending, that every one gazed trembling in the direction of the sound.

A woman's tall figure stood beneath the pillars; a long white mantle, which she clutched with both hands, floated from her head to her feet.

"Woe betide thee, Rome! Woe betide ye, Roman people! Woe betide thee, Imperator of Rome!"

The woman came out into the portico and, as she fixed her cold, expressionless eyes upon the throng, Carinus, seized with

horror, grasped the hand of Manlius, who stood by his side.

"That is Glyceria."

Manlius also shrank back in terror.

The madwoman, with the face of a prophetess, stood upon the steps of the temple.

"Woe to those born on Roman soil, the children who must atone for the sins of the fathers, and the fathers upon whom the curse of their children falls. O Roma! The stars of ruin will appear in thy sky, and the earth will tremble beneath thee! Horror will dwell within thy walls, and peace will remain far distant. Foes will trample thee under their feet, foreign nations will show thee thy banners which they have wrested from thee, thou wilt beseech Barbarian enemies to grant thee the bare gift of life, and thy greatest foes will dwell within thy walls, for they are thine own emperors! The air, corrupted by the curses

uttered, will bring the plague upon ye, miserable mortals! Those whom famine spares will perish in battle; those whom the sea rejects the earth will swallow! O Rome, thou queen of nations, thou wilt be orphaned; thou wilt vanish like the star that falls into the waves; nothing will be left of thee save the memory of thy sins, and the grass which will grow over thy palaces; even thy gods will disappear from thy temples so that, in thy despair, thou canst pray to no one!"

A tribune bent forward to kiss the maniac's hand, and ask in a timid voice:

"What result dost thou predict for the battle to which Carinus is just marching?"

Glyceria heard the question, and looked gloomily at the soldiers.

"Fear nothing! Destroy, set brother against brother, whoever may conquer—Rome has lost. If Carinus is victor, he will uproot half Rome; if Diocletian con-

quers, he will destroy the other half, and both are well deserved. March to battle, mad nation; shed thy blood, kill thy sons, let them die in tortures and remain unburied. When their souls flutter away in the autumn mist, they will be forgotten. Men, behold your wives clasped in the arms of others, your houses burned, your children dragged to slavery, and know that there is no world where ye can find compensation. Go! Die accursed and despairing!"

Amid terrible convulsions, she sank down on the steps of the temple and, with outstretched arms, cursed the Roman people even while her lips were almost incapable of speech.

"Take back your curse!" shouted the flamen Dialis, rushing up to her and seizing her hand.

With her last strength Glyceria raised herself, her eyes rolled wildly over the throng and, once more summoning all the

bitterness of her heart, she raised both hands and extending them over the multitude shrieked:

"Be accursed!"

With these words she fell back lifeless, her staring eyes, even in death, fixed upon Manlius.

CHAPTER XII.

THE armies of the imperial rivals met between Belgrade and Szeudrö. The Imperator Carinus' troops were perfectly fresh; Diocletian's legions were wearied by fatiguing marches.

Carinus ordered his tent to be pitched on the top of a hill, whence, at Manlius's side, he watched the conflict.

The result was for a long time doubtful. Diocletian's skill and experience as a general held the superior numbers of the foe in check.

"Your leaders are good for nothing," cried Manlius; "Diocletian's centre might be broken by a general, resolute assault, for his weakest legions are stationed there, and then half his wing would be lost."

"Make the necessary arrangements yourself," said Carinus.

"Forward with the reserve, tribunes!" shouted Manlius. "The foreign legions must be sacrificed; let them be hewn down, and then on with the Triarians. Send against the Phrygian cavalry the German bands, who must hamstring the horses with their long swords. Let no one remain here. March forward with all your men. I alone can guard the Cæsar."

The result of these orders was an immediate change in the tide of battle. Diocletian perceived that a skilled commander, who knew the weaknesses of his army, was opposing him; he hastily gave the signal for retreat to save his force from destruction.

Standing in the entrance of his tent Carinus watched the progress of the conflict. His troops were everywhere driving the enemy before them, his cavalry was pressing onward.

The flush of triumph glowed upon his face, every feature was radiant with the pride of victory, his heart throbbed with joy.

"I have conquered!" he exclaimed, wild with delight, clapping his hands.

"But I, too, have conquered," said a bitter, terrible voice behind him, and the Cæsar felt an iron hand seize his arm and drag him into the tent.

Carinus, startled, glanced back and saw the gloomy face of Manlius, who was crushing his arm with one hand, and in the other held a drawn sword.

"What do you want?" asked the Imperator in alarm.

"Do you remember, Carinus, the girl who killed herself before your eyes to escape your embrace? That girl was my promised wife. Do you know what I want now?"

"Manlius, you are jesting. What do you want of me? Why do you terrify me?"

"I could have killed you often when, overpowered by drunkenness, you lay in a sound sleep, in the intoxication of your crimes, but I wished to await the moment when you were happy, when you had reached the summit of your renown, before I slew you."

"Mercy! Help!"

"No one can hear your call; the shouts of joy drown your whimpering. Do you hear the cries of triumph and the glorification of your name rising on all sides? Do you hear the universal cheer: 'Long live Carinus?'—Now, *die*, Carinus!"

The next moment another horseman rode among the exulting troops; his right hand waved a lance from whose point gazed down the head of the conquering Imperator.

The victorious troops surrendered to Diocletian.

THE END.

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